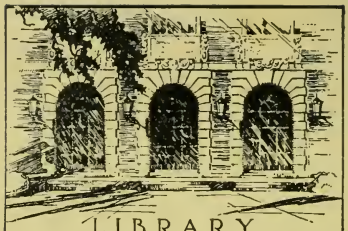
8x3
Sa22m
v.3



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
Sa22m
v.3

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

http://www.archive.org/details/mariadomestictal03stge

MARIA,

A DOMESTIC TALE.

DEDICATED BY PERMISSION

TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE OF SAXE-COBURG.

By CATHERINE ST. GEORGE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

London:

PUBLISHED BY J. PORTER, BOOKSELLER TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE, 81, PALL MALL.

1817.

Printed by R. and A. Taylor, Shoe Lane, London.

F23
Sa22m
v.3

MARIA.

LETTER FROM MARIA TO MRS. STEWART.

AGAIN, dear madam, I ask your attention to the sequel of my story.

The late earl of U—— had been dead three weeks, when his son, who had succeeded him in his honours and titles, appeared once more at my side, expressing his joy at seeing me, and telling me he had been devising a plan which I should no doubt approve of.

"I have been thinking of a scheme," continued the earl, "on which I want your opinion.—You know this is a time of mourning; my family cannot enter into public, nor would it be judged proper, Maria, that we should acknowledge our marriage at this period. I suppose about

Christmas you will make me a happy father: after that event we will disclose our union: —and I think, Maria, it would be putting you out of the way of unpleasant surmises if we were to take a trip to Scotland. And, as a means of freeing us from any restraint, would it not be well to purchase a plain travelling coach, and go by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Ford, and take only Jane, with my own man Gifford?—What think you of this plan?"

"Indeed, my lord, I do not know how far your ideas may be just: I own mine do not exactly agree with them. I do not like to use artifice on any occasion. Pardon me, my dear lord, but we seem to have been acting false characters—at least, I have—from the time I landed in England."

"Well, Maria, we will say no more about it: I thought the journey would do me good—that I should have been so happy in your society!—I was wrong: I reasoned as I wished, not as I ought."

"My dearest Charles! forgive my seem-

ing unkindness; do not for a moment suppose that I can be forgetful of your happiness;—the world to me is a bauble: next to God, you are the sole object of my care, my thoughts, my affection! I beg that we may adopt the plan you proposed; and as soon as you please: I am ready this moment to go with you to any part of the globe."

"Dearest Maria, I rejoice that the cold dictates of prudence have given way to a more delightful sensation;—I live but in your affection! I will hasten every preparation for our speedy departure."

Effectively we left London on the following Thursday; and after traversing the north of England we crossed over into Scotland, and seated ourselves in the village of Scone. The earl had left to me the choice of a residence, and I had many reasons for fixing on this spot. It was near Perth, where I knew, though only by name, of a Catholic family that kept a chaplain. I was glad to be within reach of attending prayers:—an air of melancholy seemed to

breathe around the ruins of what had formerly been the residence of royalty, and I fancied I should derive consolation in recalling the changes it had undergone. The fertile valleys bordering the Tay, and the majestic rocks and scenery of Dunkeld above, formed a contrast that greatly pleased me. There I spent ten happy months —Would that the delusion had lasted, or it had never begun! During these months the earl went twice to England on law business; but his absence each time was so short, that his eagerness to return was a fresh source of happiness. It seemed to me that my joy was complete on the 2d of December, when I had the felicity of being a mother, and presented the earl with a son, who was called Charles after him.

This event did not appear productive of all the comfort I had expected my lord to have felt on the occasion. His spirits grew every day more and more depressed: on that account I rejoiced when he informed me that a letter from England required his im-

mediate presence. "The lawyers," he said, "had involved him in a suit, which would require his attendance, and, he feared, would protract his stay perhaps two months." Far from the least apprehension, I was pleased at this summons; hoping that change of air would amend his health and his spirits: and knowing my own situation rendered my travelling impossible, I did not name it. Three months passed, during which I heard several times from the earl: in every letter he spoke of his regret at being so long detained. At the expiration of that time I had again the pleasure of welcoming my lord. It was but too visible that the wished for-change in his health had not taken place: he looked worse; and I remarked that he was often absent to the scenes around him; from which I endeavoured to learn if he had any particular cause of uneasiness: he assured me there was no other but what arose from law proceedings; that he had been grievously harassed and tormented; and that he was

about to be further annoyed, by being obliged in the ensuing month to take his seat in the House of Lords; and he hated every thing that called him from his peaceful retreat—saying, he should prefer the humble village of Scone to the grandeur of a palace.—His fondness for Charles seemed to augment, and he would nurse him in his arms for hours successively.

I now felt myself quite well, and the desire of being known as wife of the man I so entirely loved was now stronger than ever. The birth of my boy demanded this acknowledgement, and I felt determined to press its immediate necessity.

"My dearest wife," said my lord (a name by which he had never before addressed me), "I have particular reasons for not taking you with me this time—reasons which regard your own happiness entirely:—the next time, if you then wish it, you shall accompany me back; but be assured, when you quit this spot you will bid adieu to earthly happiness. You are little aware of

the miseries you must encounter in the great world: Do not urge it now; rest satisfied that I have a powerful motive for wishing you to remain here at present."

I endeavoured to reconcile myself to my lord's representation, and he departed. But my happiness was doomed to meet a severe trial in this tranquil abode. In the absence of my lord my dear boy caught the small-pox, I suppose from a beggar he met in the village; and notwithstanding very good medical assistance which I had from Perth, as well as the advice of the family physician from Dunkeld, my sweet boy died on the eleventh day. Nothing could, I think, exceed the anguish I felt on that occasion. I apprized his father of the melancholy event: he set off with all possible speed to condole with me;—I believed, sincerely. He lamented that the sitting of parliament did not permit his stay. I told him the place which had so lately been my delight was now become so dreary that I could no longer feel happy in it, and begged he would take

me with him to England; that if, on account of my mysterious birth, he felt a disinclination to introduce me to his family, I would be contented to live near him—so long as I possessed his affection the world held no attraction for me. He consented; and I returned with him to England. Having left the choice of a residence to myself, I felt most partial to the one I had had in Sloane-street; and fortunately finding it unoccupied, I engaged it.

The earl fixed his abode in Cavendish-square. He called upon me almost daily, but never stopped the night. On a Friday he regularly sent his chariot to take me to his beautiful cottage near Barnet. I perceived him to be greatly altered: his temper was fretful; he generally found fault with something as often as he entered the house. I began to fear he had got into a habit of gambling, as I learned from his conversation that he associated a good deal with persons who played deep. I the more readily gave into this thought, because I

found him less generous with regard to my expenses. He used to be unlimited in his allowance: now he confined me to a certain sum; and this, I fancied, was paid with reluctance. I lived in the same retired manner I had hitherto observed, going out only for the sake of air and exercise;—happy in the earl's society, I felt no wish to enlarge my acquaintance.

Thus time passed away imperceptibly for nearly two years, without any apparent alteration in my circumstances. I had ceased to say any thing more of my marriage being made public, for I plainly saw it was not the earl's intention to do so; and he was become so morose that I feared to irritate him. At this period I was so far happy as to believe myself in possession of his entire affection, and a great share of his confidence. He told me of many losses he had sustained at play, and spoke of his law difficulties without reserve.

During the whole of this time Mr. Roper had never once called upon me, although

he could not help observing my attendance at chapel, and I should have supposed would naturally have sought me at my old lodging. I was surprised and hurt; and one rainy morning I resolved to make the weather an excuse for waiting after prayers, to have the opportunity of asking why he did not favour me with a call as formerly.

"You cannot, madam," he replied, "be ignorant of the cause of my absence."

"I am not conscious, sir, to what you can possibly allude. If to any thing in my conduct, be assured, sir, that I am perfectly ignorant of it."

"Then, madam, I think it is my duty—to me a painful one—to inform you. Do me the favour to walk into the parlour."

I followed. When we were seated, "From the newspapers, madam," said Mr. Roper, "you must have learnt the event which prevented my paying my respects in Sloane-street."

"Indeed, sir," I answered, "strange as I dare say it may appear, I can give you my

word I have never seen a paper since my return from Scotland."

"Then, dear madam, I pity you! as be assured they have been purposely kept from you. Are you really unacquainted with the change that has taken place in the family in Cavendish-square?"

"Totally so."

"Then, madam, I am grieved to inform you that the earl married Lady Sarah during the first year of your residence in Scotland .... Of course you must, to those who are about you, appear in the light the most degrading to a virtuous mind."

"Why, sir, did you not save me from this dreadful state by earlier information?"

"It is my sacred function, madam, to soothe the suffering victim, to encourage the repenting sinner, to ease the doubting mind, and not to force the understanding to act against its will. Could I have supposed that you were not the willing dupe, nothing should have deterred me from taking some active steps in your behalf. Indeed, I had

it in contemplation to have waited upon the earl previous to his marriage, had not a lady from Holywell stated in a letter to a friend of mine the commiseration she had felt for a young person, then with his lordship, whom she would have believed perfectly virtuous but from her own avowal, immediately confirmed by his lordship's personal declaration. This, good lady, prevented an interference which I then concluded could have proved only useless."

"And what, sir," I asked, "would you now advise me to do?"

"That depends mostly upon yourself:—you know the laws of the country. You must be aware that in the eyes of the world you are leading an abandoned life, an injurious example to society. Your case is pitiable indeed! and sorry am I that I cannot advise you, being little versed in affairs of the heart; with which this has much to do. Examine well its dictates, and pray to Him who is the Giver of wisdom to guide and direct you in your difficulties, and to grant

you fortitude to support you under them." Seeing that I was greatly agitated, he walked with me to my door, regretting that his attendance on a sick person prevented his entering at that time, but promised to see me shortly.

This occurred upon the Friday, the day I usually spent with the earl in the country, and I sat down to form some resolution. One idea succeeded another until my mind was lost in perplexity. I had recourse to prayer, and felt somewhat composed. The day passed on without any carriage appearing. This gave me time for reflection; and I formed the determination to go early in the morning and surprise my lord: I should then ascertain the fact beyond a doubt; and if all proved as I feared it would, it was my fixed resolution to leave him.

Accordingly after a sleepless night I went, accompanied by Jane, to the cottage, choosing a public conveyance, as least likely to awaken suspicion. In the coach I met with Mrs. Fisher. Had we been alone, I verily

believe in my then state of mind I should have made her the confidante of my uneasiness, so strongly did her appearance prepossess me in her favour. We alighted at the shrubbery gate, and were walking towards the cottage, when the groom, who had often been with his master at my house, met us, and having passed us a few steps called Jane to him. I walked slowly forward; but Jane soon overtook me, and almost breathless from agitation requested I would return. "Coaches, my lady," said Jane, "pass here every hour; and we shall only have to walk quietly till one overtakes us."

"My good girl," I replied, "unless you give me a substantial reason, I shall certainly go forward."

"For God's sake, my lady, do not; there is a woman here now, John tells me, who would very likely treat us both rudely."

At any other time I could have smiled at Jane: but I knew it proceeded from the kindness of her nature; which made her suppose, by speaking in this general man-

ner, she should conceal my being about to be the object of displeasure. I instantly stopped, and said, "Jane, if you will desire John to inform his master a person wishes to speak with him, who will not detain him five minutes, I will then return with you."

The good girl soon executed my commission, and went back by my desire to wait for me at the shrubbery gate. The earl soon came out; when I informed him that his treachery was known to me, and requested him to tell me at what hour he would call in Sloane-street to treat about our separation. He trembled exceedingly; and replied, "I will wait on my dearest Maria at ten to-morrow;—not, I trust, to settle our separation, but our accommodation."

With these few words we parted. I hastened back to Jane, when in a few minutes a coach came by which soon conveyed us to Sloane-street.

My mind felt already relieved of part of its weight, in having intimated to the earl my intention to quit him: every moment

strengthened my resolution of doing so; and I employed myself all that evening in preparing for the event.—First, I resolved that nothing within my power should prevent the execution of my design; and as I did not wish to have witnesses to a parting which I knew would cost me dear, I resolved to send Jane away that evening. The wages due to her were only for three months, but I paid her for twelve; telling her that something unpleasant made me wish to quit London for a time; that I should not take any servant with me, and therefore I was under the necessity of dismissing her. I desired her when she had put up her own things to call a coach, into which I ordered my own trunks to be placed; and thanking Jane for her services left the door at the same time she did. I had taken the opportunity of settling with my landlady whilst Jane was employed in packing, and had paid her a week over, telling her I should most likely remain a few days longer in her lodgings. I then merely drove

to Warwick-street, where without getting out I requested to speak with Mr. Roper. He luckily was at home: I begged the favour of him to permit my trunks to remain in his house until I should send for them; and returned immediately to Sloane-street. There I felt a lonely being, without a fixed home of any kind. Mrs. Fisher had kindly told me to go to her on any emergency. But time must first be allowed for that lady to make her journey, and to write home, before I could possibly present myself. I had kept out some changes of linen, and resolved upon quitting my present hostess to proceed to Kentish Town, as the person whose house I had lived in there took lodgers. She was a sensible well-behaved woman, had two grown daughters, and I could remain with her until Mrs. Fisher had time to return.

I slept better that night than the preceding one, and arose much refreshed. I took my usual walk to Warwick-street, for two reasons: First, it appeared to me pru-

dent that my conduct whilst here should seem as usual, in order to prevent any suspicion as to the real cause of my departure. And secondly, I hoped to derive fortitude from an act of devotion. In the latter I was not disappointed.

On my return I had only time to take off my cloak, when a loud knock at the door roused all my feelings, and sent my resolution for a moment to flight; —and but for a moment, for on seeing the earl enter with apparent indifference, my recollection returned; and I felt, and I believe looked with all the dignity of an injured wife. Some minutes passed in silence, which I first broke, by saying "It is impossible, my lord, to express the misery your unjustifiable conduct has occasioned. Why when we went to Scotland did you not inform me of your situation? or rather, my lord, why did you make me your wife, without first duly considering whether you could present me as I then was to your family?—Such I then was, I am now, my lord. During nearly

six years I have been to you a faithful and affectionate wife; your will has been my law in every thing; and in return your lordship has unjustly robbed me of my place in society—has deprived me, by mean artifice, of a name; and, in exchange, made me the sport of wanton degradation."

"Hold, Maria! I deserve all this—Let me thus far vindicate myself. I swear that nothing but the losses I experienced in play should have induced me to accept any hand but yours. I depended on your affection for forgiveness—I knew your love of retirement; my heart was always yours—my marriage with Lady Sarah had nothing to do with attachment, I hate the very sight of her!"

"But, my lord, you are aware that you acted in opposition both to the laws of God and man—no happy consequence could be expected to follow such an union. Did you expect, my lord, that your first marriage could for ever remain concealed?"

"Think not to alarm me, madam, by call-

ing Houlier's ghost to prove a prior engagement," said the earl with a sneer. "As to your own evidence, that would only pass as the false tale of a disappointed mistress."

"Your sarcasm, my lord, deserves that you should know what is in my power. Your lordship is well acquainted with Doctor A—— and Mr. Lindsey; they were witnesses to this attestation, which Mr. Houlier thought proper to execute, and of which you should never have been apprized, but for your present unwarrantable conduct."

"And is it your intention, madam, to publish it to the world?" asked the now trembling earl.

"My lord, I feel thankful that I have no child to divide my affections on this trying occasion—I can follow the dictates of my heart; and thus I free you from every shadow of apprehension," throwing the attestation into the fire. "I have weighed the matter well—No child is wronged—no family shares my disgrace—I stand alone in the world, unprotected, unowned—I only

shall be the sufferer!—As far as is in my power I divorce myself. But my principles teach me that a solemn vow cannot be broken; I will observe mine, my lord, whilst I live. I mean to retire to a secluded spot till a peace with France shall allow me to return to my convent in Paris, where I hope to end my days, and in acts of religion learn to be resigned."

"My dearest Maria, I hate myself," said the earl, who was now agitated to tears. "Never till this moment did I know the value of your heart, or the strength of my own affection—I cannot live without sometimes beholding you; I will take any place, Maria, for you in England."

"No, my lord, it must not be. I will not trust myself near you:—love would soon weaken every resolution, and I might become the frail being the world thinks me. All I ask is, that your lordship would pay to Mr. Roper, for my use, one hundred pounds per annum;—and that only till I can return to France: when there, I shall no longer need it. And now, dear Charles!

farewell! By that name I first knew you. Here is my ring; it no longer becomes me to wear it—keep it for my sake. And by this last kiss I conjure you, act kindly towards her who now supplies my place."

The warm tears bedewed both our cheeks. By one sudden impulse I checked the efforts of nature, and hastily quitted the apartment. Then taking my small parcel with me from the next room, I soon found myself in the street before I was well sensible of the action. An empty coach passed me; I motioned to the man, he let down the steps, and in a few minutes I was conveyed to Kentish Town.

You now, dear madam, are acquainted with the whole of my conduct. I am as happy here as my peculiar situation will permit. I will remain in this place till I can go to France, which period I hope is not very distant. After the confidence I here repose in you, it seems almost needless to say that I do not wish to make my story known. Though you may think it singular that I have forgiven the earl, I neither wish,

nor would retract the promise I made to him. It would even be absurd to speak of my marriage now. I might occasion much uneasiness, without effecting any good; since I have destroyed the only means of proving its authenticity. It is very gratifying to my feelings to be able to remove the odium of which I must have appeared deserving on our first acquaintance; yet I would not have been thus favourable to myself, were it not for the necessity there seems that I should declare the circumstances of my life, to ascertain the existence of my parents.

To your discretion I commit the above narrative; requesting you will not divulge it, unless required in order to obtain the knowledge I so ardently wish. With a hope that you will continue to me the honour of your notice and friendship, I remain, dear madam, your grateful

MARIA.

Mrs. Fisher felt overjoyed with the perusal of Maria's history, and was now con-

vinced of the existence of her daughter. She rejoiced at finding her strictly virtuous, and could not help admiring the prudence of Maria throughout the whole of her conduct. But as she turned from her child to the contemplation of herself, she felt humiliated to the utmost: And in proportion as Mrs. Fisher dwelt upon the amiable disposition of her daughter, she reproached herself as the cause of all her sufferings. Had she not been left in that clandestine manner at the convent, her life would have been differently spent.—She found herself unequal at this moment to lay down any fixed plan; but as she expected the gentleman to call every day for the parcel, she prepared to return it, and wrote the following note.

"*To Miss Providence, Mrs. Medcalf's, Douglas, Isle of Man.*

"My dear young lady,

"I have the pleasure to inform you that your mother lives. She desires me to tell

you, she is so full of joy at the discovery, that she cannot now commit her thoughts to paper. Could she follow her inclination, she would immediately set out; but she is not at liberty to do that; yet hopes the time is not far distant when she may enjoy the happiness of folding you in her arms. I am forbid to mention her name; and am only allowed to say that she occupies a place in the middle rank of life, neither possesses title nor honours, and but a very moderate share of fortune; yet she would not exchange her present happiness, in knowing you to be her daughter, for the attainment of a diadem.—So sincerely do I share my friend's feelings, that I cannot now advert to any other subject. For the same reason, will you have the goodness to inform Mrs. Stewart, with my respects, that I will take the next opportunity of writing to her?

"With the most fervent wishes for your future felicity I remain, my dear young lady, your obliged and affectionate,

"MARIA FISHER."

No sooner was the above note written to Miss Providence than the gentleman called. Mrs. Fisher hastened to put up the papers, accompanied with the following.

LETTER XVIII.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO MRS. STEWART.

Sloane-street.

DEAR MADAM,

I HAVE perused and now return the inclosed papers. The haste in which I am obliged to send them prevents the possibility of saying all I wish concerning the young lady, for whom I am more than ever interested; and request you will give her the note I inclose.

I will thank you to present my respects to Mr. Stewart and the young ladies. You may expect a long letter by the next opportunity. Mr. G—— waits while I write this hasty line. Believe me, dear madam, your greatly obliged friend and servant,

MARIA FISHER.

Many and various were the plans Mrs. Fisher framed to obtain a sight of her daughter. Every hour presented a fresh scheme, which the succeeding one obliterated; until she was surprised to find several days had elapsed without having fixed upon any thing. As to going to her daughter, her husband's will prevented her; for though it was almost sure the journey might be accomplished within the limited period, yet it must depend on wind and weather, both which were too precarious to risk much upon. Then, with regard to Maria's coming to London, there were also many objections.—So after numberless arguments with herself, she determined to inform Mrs. Stewart of the whole truth, and let her converse upon it with her daughter; choosing rather to commit the acknowledgement of her error to a new acquaintance, than to one whose friendship had stood the trial of more than thirty years. The truth was, there was that in the countenance of Mrs. Stewart which indicated a

greater latitude of indulgence, than was to be expected from the known rigid manners of Mrs. Hunter—and human frailty courts indulgence.

Having made up her mind as to what method she should pursue, Mrs. Fisher lost no time in further arguments with herself, but hastened to fulfil her resolution by the following.

LETTER XIX.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO MRS. STEWART.

" *Sloane-street.*

" I KNOW not, dear madam, how to begin my excuse for the trouble I am about to give in making you the confidante of a circumstance which it was not my intention to have divulged till I had ceased to exist.

" Maria's narrative informed you that she had been left at the convent at about two years old. The motive for sending her there arose from the imprudence of her mother, who married Maria's father so early as three months after the death of her first husband. Feeling ashamed to acknowledge having acted so contrary to propriety and the usage of the world, they resolved to conceal their union for a time; not considering that an issue of such marriage must render a disclosure of it necessary—which happened in this case by the birth of Maria. I believe

deception has never been employed without involving the actors in numerous, and at first unforeseen, falsehoods, to support that deception—so it happened with them. At the time Maria was born the marriage remained unacknowledged; the clergyman who had performed the ceremony was dead; and in order to avoid the guilty interpretation which the parents knew themselves liable to from the opinion of the world, they found a sort of necessity for concealing the offspring of their imprudent union. The father proposed the convent of A— nuns as an asylum for the child, telling his wife he would, to save her feelings, write a letter to the abbess to explain the reason for asking the protection of the convent for the infant. The letter was sealed by the father, and left by the mother with her child. She reconciled her mind to the act, from a belief that she could claim her child at any time. It happened that her husband prevented her so doing during his lifetime; and at his death she found a copy of the letter that had been

delivered by her with her daughter, the contents of which surprised and shocked her—so totally different was it from what she had supposed. From the day that she left the little Maria at the gate, her mind had been painfully anxious concerning her:—the hope she had nourished from day to day and from year to year, that her husband would recall their child, had rendered her life tolerable. Now that the contents of the letter were known to her, she was wretched at the thoughts of the complicated misery in which her neglect might have involved her child. How will your benevolent mind be shocked, when I inform you that I am that guilty mother!...Thank God, I do not see you at this moment: I should fear to look in that face, hitherto expressive of the kindest feelings; now, perhaps, contracted with contempt for her who could so far forget her duty.

"I fear this confidence will lose me a portion of your esteem, though your kind disposition may induce you to continue your

friendship. At all events, justice to a suffering daughter demands that the truth be told, and I have not seen one to whom I should so willingly acknowledge myself wrong as yourself. But in order to put my conduct as much as possible in its true light, I must trouble you with a long story, beginning as far back as my first marriage.

"The cause of discord in the married state generally originates from the ill accordance of the parties. People look only to casual occurrences; such as money, beauty, or some outward attraction—these are unstable things, all liable to change and decay: whereas a similarity of principles, morals, and disposition, would afford a more certain prospect of permanent affection and lasting happiness. My own mother possessed an uncommon share of beauty, which occasioned her to be the wife of a man of large property and high connexions. The disparity of rank subjected her to the contempt of my father's family: her husband's behaviour was such, that it produced the strongest dis-

gust. So unhappy did she find herself, that she constantly advised me to settle in a lower sphere of life. I loved my mother very sincerely; and seeing that she and my father were continually engaged in disputes, I naturally took the part of my mother, and thought her right in every thing. Mr. Clarke was the son of a tradesman; he had conceived a fondness for me, which he would never have presumed to declare but for the encouragement he met with from my mother. Her family and his had been long acquainted; and knowing his parents were good sort of people, and that they had realized a handsome property, she assured me that I should be happier with him than I could hope to be in a more exalted station. I saw him but seldom, because his visits were made secretly. However, taking it for granted that he was all my mother fancied, and thinking his gratitude would ensure my happiness, I consented to go with him to Scotland, when my father was absent on business in London. My mother acquainted him with the sad

catastrophe, concealing of course her foreknowledge of the circumstance. At first he stormed, and swore that though I was his only child he would cut me off with a shilling: but from the interference of friends he was prevailed upon to give us five thousand pounds, upon condition that we never fixed ourselves in the neighbourhood. We immediately consented to his proposal; and from that period my home has been in London.

"On our first settling there we entered into business. Mr. Clarke commenced wine-merchant: and here I soon perceived a difference in the manners of my present associates. Between my husband and myself there could be little intercourse of sentiment, as our opinions differed on every subject. I argued much with myself; and, had he treated me with gentleness, am convinced I should have so far conquered my feelings that I should have endeavoured to conform to his wishes. But he was not to be pleased: to all my representations his constant reply

was, 'that he would conquer my upstart spirit:' and so much was he bent thereon, that every word he uttered was in the tone of command.

"Although our business went on exceedingly well, yet Mr. Clarke was of so penurious a temper that he would scarcely allow me wherewith to appear decently. Never did any woman suffer more from the overbearing disposition of a man: I was become quite intimidated, and dreaded to hear his footstep. Often and vainly did I lament having married a person with whom I had so little previous acquaintance. The day on which I was nineteen I heard, as I thought, a shriek:—I ran out of the parlour, and found it to proceed from the garret. Ignorant of what it was, I hastened to the room; but how was I astonished to behold John (an apprentice in the shop) tied to the bedstead in a state of nakedness, whilst Mr. Clarke was lashing him with the horsewhip! Shocked at this sight, and hoping to appease Mr. Clarke, I knelt down between him

and the boy, and begged for my sake he would desist. But he with the utmost brutality said, 'Madam, as long as you stay here I shall treat you in like manner.' So he did; till to save myself from serious injury I retired to my own apartment.

"From that day I looked forward to the death of one of us as a desirable event. I acknowledge that often when he has been abroad, if he staid beyond the usual hour, I have felt almost a hope that some accident had so far befallen him as to bring him to a state of repentance.—What a situation for two people who had vowed to love each other! But this was impossible; he would not suffer any one to love him.

"About this period Mr. Clarke took Mr. Fisher for his partner. They were nearly opposite in their dispositions: the latter was then gentle and compassionate, and often by his looks showed how much he commiserated my lot. This, however, was construed into an offence; which brought upon me additional harshness. Thus life

dragged on till I attained my twenty-first year; when in a few days Mr. Clarke burst a blood-vessel, which occasioned his death three weeks after the accident. During his illness I felt miserable respecting the wishes I had at times entertained: I was grieved to see him suffer, and felt ready to do any thing in my power to alleviate his pains. But he was resolved never to be persuaded to think well of me. A few days previous to his dissolution he thus addressed me: 'Maria, I am no stranger to the regard you bear Mr. Fisher: you think to deceive me; you cannot. I am well acquainted with all your contrivance.'

"'I am sorry, Mr. Clarke, you should have formed so wrong an opinion; I have not used any contrivance—Why should I? having nothing on Mr. Fisher's account to conceal; my regard for him being no more than I should feel for any other person in my house, who should conduct himself in the same manner that he has done.'

"'You tell an infamous lie, Maria! you

are fond of the fellow. But mind—if you marry him, my curse fall upon you:—May you suffer from that day to the hour of your death! Moreover, if it be permitted for the spirit of a departed person to haunt another, I will pursue you incessantly—Expect to see my ghost between you.'

"I knelt down, and assured him in the most solemn manner 'that I was undeserving of his suspicion.' Mr. Fisher had never expressed himself in the least improper manner, or showed any thing more than commiseration for my fate—which I think any other person would have done. Mr. Clarke died, and by his will left me only twenty pounds for mourning, and a legacy of fifty pounds; his property he bequeathed to a nephew.

"As soon as the funeral was over, I wrote an account of my circumstances to my father, in hopes he would have assisted me. He had now acquired the honour of knighthood, the king having conferred it on him for services he had rendered his country

through his intrepid exertions when colonel of the militia during a riot in his county town. My mother had been dead twelve months. In answer to my letter, my father advised me to be content with the lot I had myself chosen; that, provided I had married suitably to my birth, he said, I should have found in him an affectionate parent, who would have provided me a proper settlement: but as I had chosen to chalk out a path for myself, I must remain in it; and not trouble him with representations, which would be unavailing on my part, and could only be disgraceful to him, since he was about to form an alliance with a family of distinction, and his future prospects required that he should take care of his property, as it was probable he might have a family by his second marriage to inherit it.

"I was hurt beyond expression on reading this cruel letter. Mr. Fisher was present: I showed it to him; saying at the same moment, 'I will never incur a second refusal: to-morrow I will go a few miles in

the country, and there engage two rooms for my future residence: I will try indeed to procure some employment by which I may hope to be comfortable, if not happy.'

"'I request, dear madam,' said Mr. Fisher, 'you will do me the favour to remain here as long as is agreeable to yourself—(he had taken the house and stock, intending to carry on the business)—I shall be highly gratified by your doing so: I should detest the place were you to leave it; your society has formed my comfort in this house; and, to own a truth, was my principle motive in remaining in it. I should have preferred another part of the town for carrying on my business; but thought this would from habit be pleasant to you: I had flattered myself you would not have felt in such haste to quit one who wishes above all other things to prove himself a friend.—But I beg your pardon, madam, for thus betraying thoughts which to you may perhaps seem unseasonable: I will endeavour to be more circumspect in future;—it is hard to be

silent, where one is most interested in speaking.'

"I felt grateful to Mr. Fisher; he seemed the only friend except Mrs. Hunter, whom I had few opportunities of seeing, her husband being almost always at Bath on account of his health. Mr. Fisher's manner now appeared so different to what it had hitherto been; there was something so soothing and tender, that for the first time I thought I perceived an attachment I had never before suspected, and with which I felt myself much more inclined to be pleased than angry. The next day proved wet; which was sufficient reason for not going out: and day succeeded day, until a whole month had elapsed without the subject having been again mentioned. I then expressed my thanks for his hospitality; and, not wishing to intrude on the kind disposition of any one, mentioned my determination to go the ensuing week. Mr. Fisher now declared, his affection for me had led him to hope that I should not again have

proposed our separation; and candidly avowed his wish that I would consent to become his wife.

"I related the conversation which had passed between Mr. Clarke and myself. He laughed at the idea of being frightened by a bugbear, and hoped a woman of my understanding would not give into such absurdities. I was ashamed of being thought pusillanimous, and declared I never had belief in supernatural appearances. I was gratified by his disinterested conduct, and told him we would resume the conversation some months hence; which was a tacit acknowledgement his offer had pleased me.

"Mr. Fisher was only four years older than myself. His person was good; his countenance pleasing; and what I had seen of his disposition mild and forbearing. I hoped that now I should begin to taste happiness. Suffering my partiality for Mr. Fisher to overbalance my judgement, which would otherwise have exposed to my view the glaring impropriety of the step I was about to take,

I was weak enough in three months after Mr. Clarke's death to marry Mr. Fisher; and this in so private a manner that the clergyman who performed the ceremony was the only person present: and by a strange fatality of circumstances, the young man was the day after taken suddenly ill, and died in the following week!

"The death of the clergyman, who had unfortunately neglected to register our marriage, first served to open my eyes. I hated myself! The conduct of my former husband seemed lenient, when compared with my own in having married the man for whom he had expressed so strong a dislike—so soon too!—and I actually saw, or thought I saw, when alone in my chamber, his figure before me! My mind was distracted. I was proceeding down stairs to the parlour, when on the landing-place I distinctly heard a footstep approaching, but could not discern any one. Incapable of holding the candle, it fell from my hands, and I was in total darkness; when I fancied some one passing so near

as to push me close to the wall. One only thought then possessed me, that—it was my departed husband! I summoned all my fortitude; and confident it was his offended spirit, I formed an instantaneous resolution to quit Mr. Fisher for a time.

"On telling Mr. Fisher my determination, I was surprised to perceive his willingness to part with me. He replied, 'I think we had better separate, Maria, till the usual time of mourning is expired; for I own I should feel it very unpleasant to be continually teased with your fretfulness at having committed what you look upon as a breach against the laws of society; or to be perpetually told that Mr. Clarke haunts my house—But what is your plan?—where can you spend twelve months? for I suppose I am not to expect you back sooner.'

"'I will try to get into some family going to the Continent,' I replied, 'there I should feel happiest; and I will tell the servant I am going into the country for a time.'

" Accordingly I had all my clothes packed up by seven o'clock in the morning; and having ordered a coach, as soon as my trunks were put in I entered, desiring the man to drive to Radnor-street, where lived the only person with whom, in the absence of Mrs. Hunter, I had formed an acquaintance:—she was the wife of an apothecary. To her I related so much of my story as I found convenient to inform her of; and concluded by telling her, ' it was my wish to attend some family abroad, as I thought whilst I was young and in good health it would be prudent to exert myself, and save my legacy until I should stand more in need of it.' She was of a very penurious turn herself, praised my plan much, and said ' she was glad it was in her power to serve me, and her noble patroness lady H——, who had that morning parted with the governess of her only daughter, a child of seven years old. I should think your education exactly fits you for the place.

The worst is,' continued my friend, 'that in this case you must leave town to-morrow; as the family are to set out in the morning for Dover, with an intention to remain two years abroad, the earl of H—— having got into some pecuniary difficulties; but not such as to make a residence with the family uncomfortable; since their affairs are arranged, and they have a handsome allowance upon the estate till it is disencumbered.' I replied, that I would return to prepare for the journey, and that if my friend would mention me to lady H——, and honour me with her personal recommendation, I would wait upon her ladyship that evening. She promised to go directly on the business; and begged I would, if possible, be with her before nine o'clock, when she would herself accompany me to the countess,—so confident was she her ladyship would take a person of her recommendation. With this satisfactory prospect I hastened to the coach, apprehensive it might

be gone, having left my trunks in it, not daring to mention to my friend that I had brought them with me. All was safe. I then drove into the city to a servant of mine, who had settled near Ludgate-hill, and there I spent the intervening time.

" By the appointed hour I was again at the apothecary's door. This time I said I had my luggage with me; which my friend perceiving, she proposed we should proceed together to lady H——, who received us very graciously. A few words were sufficient to conclude an agreement between us. I was to have thirty guineas yearly, with all expenses allowed for my return, should I not find myself comfortable in France. I was greatly pleased; and before I parted with my friend, after thanking her most warmly for her kindness, I gave her a note (which I had previously written) for Mr. Fisher, acquainting him that I had made an engagement to accompany a lady to France, a temporary absence being necessary to tranquillize the present state of my

mind. I also requested him to inform my husband's executor of my intended journey, with my desire that he would retain my legacy till he heard from or saw me. I had also penned a few lines to Mrs. Hunter (then at Bath), to let her know that finding myself very low-spirited, and not having any family to claim my attention, I had taken the resolution of attending a lady to France, thinking that travelling would be of service to my health; and that as soon as I should be settled there I would write to her more particularly. And thus having in my idea settled all concerns on this side of the water, I began my journey with tolerable cheerfulness. Not so my patroness lady H——: she lamented during the whole of the first day the unfortunate necessity of her quitting England; whilst her lord in the kindest manner used every endeavour to cheer her. On crossing the water, her complainings subsided into a silent melancholy, from which she scarcely seemed roused even by sickness. Her child, she

told me from the first, she committed entirely to my care; 'I cannot trouble myself with her,' said lady H——, 'so much does my mind suffer in being obliged to separate from my friends and acquaintance.'

"How unreasonable did this conduct appear to me,—to give way to despondency for the loss of that which was more than compensated by the possession of the society of an affectionate husband and an amiable child! I thought, with such comforts I could with pleasure have left every other being: I should have considered myself at the height of human happiness. Such were my thoughts; because these were exactly the blessings I had felt the want of. Lady H—— had never known the want of them, therefore she was ignorant of their value.

"Upon entering France, I was much amused with the different appearance of the people and the country: the general liveliness of their manners pleased me so much, that I longed to be able to understand their language. Lord H—— procured me

some books, and was kind enough to allow me to share the instruction which he gave every morning to his little daughter; for whom he did not wish to have a French governess, lest she should lose the pure pronunciation of her English. We continued travelling till we came to Lyons, a delightful city. Here, thought I, lady H—— will surely regain her spirits; the most unruffled mind would have found tranquillity in that mild luxuriant country. I was not mistaken: she found a remedy —not in the beautiful scenery around her, but in the gay and lively society which Lyons afforded. The sweet Matilda was left entirely to my care, except that her father never failed in giving her a lesson every morning; the rest of the day he devoted to his lady.

"Before two months had elapsed I had written to Mrs. Hunter, describing the many comforts of my situation; I was really happy, except that sometimes I felt my health affected in a manner it had never

been before; and which at length compelled me to acknowledge to myself that I had all the indications of becoming a mother, an event I had not apprehended. The certainty of this distressed me so much that I could not decide what method I should pursue. Not to trouble you with a tedious detail, I will hasten to inform you, that I was soon aware of the necessity of quitting my present abode: so at the end of three months I informed lady H—— that the change in my health rendered my leaving her a matter of absolute necessity. She had often noticed with surprise my altered looks, for I was become pale and thin: 'I never heard of any person before,' said the countess, 'who was not the better for this temperate climate; but as your health suffers, I cannot object to your return; however much I have to regret your leaving Matilda; your attention to whom, I am pleased to say, did not give room to one moment's uneasiness on her account.

"I had acquired by constant application

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

a sufficient knowledge of the language to make myself imperfectly understood. I took the diligence to Paris, where I hired two rooms in a decent house in the rue St. Honoré, in which six other families also resided, so that I was not likely to be distressed for want of society: it was so far fortunate, as my spirits were so depressed I fancied any exertion was impossible, till the example of some of my fellow sufferers in adversity convinced me how necessary exertion was, and how much it could effect. From hence I wrote to Mr. Fisher an account of my situation. At the same time I addressed a letter to the executor, with an order for him to pay my legacy into the hands of Mr. Fisher; which he did. Mr. Fisher sent me an order for that, and an additional fifty pounds from himself, for which I received the value by applying to a gentleman Mr. Fisher pointed out to me in Paris. Were it possible that I could communicate my thoughts during the six months previous to my confinement, I

would do it, in order to deter my sex from every deviation from the line of prudence. But I had no wish at the time to write; and now, that the occasion is past, it would be impossible accurately to convey to the minds of others the bitterness of my reflections:—time has tended to lessen their poignancy.

" My little girl made her appearance on the 12th of May. I had no attendance but what a sister in affliction, who lodged on the same floor, had the kindness to lend me. The birth of my Maria brought with it many cares and anxieties: my ideas seemed on that occasion to have undergone a general change. I became anxious to rekindle the spark of affection in the bosom of her father; I described to him her features, and spoke in every letter of my anxiety to procure her his legal protection. Maria was nearly two years old, when Mr. Fisher wrote to say that he had taken a gentleman with him into partnership; that therefore there was not any thing to detain

him longer from the re-solemnization of that marriage on which his future happiness depended. There was one proposal he had to make, which he was sure my good sense would consider highly proper;—that I should remove to another part of the town, and that I should, for a short time, separate myself from my child. 'For,' said Mr. Fisher in his letter, 'since, from a false dread of the world's censure, you would not at the time acknowledge our marriage, it would be madness to attempt it now—indeed it would be difficult.' He had heard the convent of A—— nuns highly spoken of, and thought I could not have my child better taken care of than it would be under their inspection: and that, presuming I should approve of the plan, he had written a letter himself, to save *my feelings*, inclosing one hundred pounds; in which he had given the abbess sufficient reasons for committing the child to her protection for a short period;—that I had only to take Maria and the letter and leave them at the convent

door. He reminded me that I could whenever I pleased claim my child, who he was sure would become equally the object of his care and love as of mine. He finished by observing, that on the receipt of my answer he should commence his journey.

"I reflected upon the contents of his letter; and thinking Mr. Fisher's proposal was in this case reasonable, I resolved to follow his advice. I marked the infant's clothes with its initials *M. F.* and the next morning presented myself at the convent gate. Do not suppose I took this step with any view of getting rid of my child; or that all the feelings of a mother were not roused at parting with it even for a short time, as I then supposed. Nothing but its welfare, which I fancied by this means to promote, should have urged me to an action so apparently unnatural. From the moment I quitted the convent gate I found it impossible to remain in Paris. Had I continued there another day, my irresolution was such that I should have demanded the child. I there-

fore took the coach next morning for Boulogne, which I reached the day following. I then wrote a statement of all that had passed to Mr. Fisher, and in a fortnight received him at my lodging. A few days after, we were married by a Catholic priest; and on our arrival in London had the ceremony again performed in our parish church. It was not long before I perceived (what I had never seen the least reason to suspect) that my husband was of a most jealous disposition. From the time I first made the discovery, I was extremely careful not to do or say the least thing that could form a ground for suspicion; but every day brought fresh proof that it was a passion so deeply rooted that nothing could eradicate it: my endeavours to please him were wholly unavailing: and during the twenty years we lived together, scarcely a day passed in which I did not suffer from his doubts and ill humour. This conduct distressed me the more, because it seemed to originate in that hasty marriage so fatal to my conscience

and my happiness! My whole life has been a succession of sufferings, which I have endeavoured to bear with resignation: and I hope they will serve to appease the wrath of Heaven for the neglect of my child.

"You now, my dear madam, are acquainted with the principal events of my life. I have learnt by sad experience how extensive, though unforeseen, are the consequences of one inconsiderate action. Be assured, dearest madam, that I shall not enjoy another easy hour till I have heard from you. To your discretion I commit myself; leaving you to disclose, or not, to Maria, the misfortunes of her afflicted mother: and I hope, dear madam, you will allow me to add—Your obliged and humble servant,

"MARIA FISHER."

When Mrs. Stewart had finished reading Mrs. Fisher's letter, she began to consider in what way she should inform Miss Providence of the contents. The latter had never failed to inquire, on the arrival of every mail

that had come to Douglas since Mr. G——'s return, whether there were any news from London.—As soon as she knew that Mrs. Stewart had received a letter, Maria waited upon her friend, anxiously hoping she would mention the subject, which Mrs. Stewart did, by saying—

"I think, Miss Providence, you once told me, that in one of Mrs. Fisher's letters she expressed a wish that you would think favourably of her husband—May I ask what was your real opinion of him?"

"I can scarcely give an opinion of Mr. Fisher, my dear madam, having only seen him for a few minutes: his manner then was such that I thought him quite uncivil; and, to say the truth, a kind of dread seized me at the mere notion that in my visits to Mrs. Fisher I should be obliged to listen to his coarse language. I have often been astonished how two persons so opposite in manners and disposition could have lived comfortably together—happy, they could not possibly have been."

"I differ with you there," said Mrs. Stewart; "for I think Mrs. Fisher possesses so much amiability that she could have accommodated herself to almost any temper. From the letter I have this day received from Mrs. Fisher, I have cause to think she has met with unkind treatment from both her husbands; yet I do believe that did not form her principal source of uneasiness. She has suffered unceasing anxiety respecting her eldest daughter for the last twenty years." Maria's colour varied as she hastily interrupted Mrs. Stewart to say—

"Has Mrs. Fisher any certain hopes of ascertaining whether the person is living whom she mentioned to me as having been sent to a convent by her relation?"

"Yes; I am happy to say that Mrs. Fisher has proved beyond a doubt the existence of that young lady in the person of all others she most wished. My dear Maria, you have often expressed to me your desire to know who were your parents: you may now indulge your joy in learning that you are ac-

knowledged by an affectionate mother, who ardently longs to ask your forgiveness for her neglect of you. This letter," putting it into her hands, "will convince you how unpremeditated that neglect has been on her part; how poignant her sufferings; and how much she has regretted that an imprudent marriage should have occasioned your concealment: and that by her, who should have protected you, you should have been exposed to such great and unmerited trials."

Maria's feelings so overpowered her at the moment of receiving the letter that she was incapable of reading it, or even of listening any longer to Mrs. Stewart, who plainly saw that Miss Providence on looking at the hand-writing recognised that of Mrs. Fisher. Her emotions were not to be described, on discovering that the person in whose favour she had felt so strong a prepossession was indeed her mother! Mrs. Stewart did not attempt to interrupt Maria, but left her to the enjoyment of the new train of ideas and feelings this event must

naturally give birth to. Her mind by degrees recovered its usual serenity:—with ardent gratitude she acknowledged the wonderful dispensations of Providence in her regard; and although she fully felt the force of filial duty, which she had inclination to observe, yet her peculiar situation required the fulfilment of her former intention, as the only means of ensuring her happiness.

Two years passed away with very little variation, as far as relates to our heroine, who continued to lead a peaceful life in the Isle of Man, hoping every post might bring tidings of the war drawing to a conclusion, in order that she might adopt her first plan of retiring to her convent. This she looked to as the ultimate wish of her heart. Her time was constantly employed:—she spent a great portion of it in assisting her companions, the Miss Medcalfs, to make little ornamental works, which a friend was kind enough to dispose of at a repository for the benefit of the family. She was always a welcome visitor at Mrs. Stewart's, with

whose daughters she was very intimate. So, all things considered, Maria was as comfortable as her situation would permit. She kept up a frequent and affectionate correspondence with her mother, who derived a real consolation from the virtuous sentiments of her daughter, by whom she was encouraged to hope that her sufferings would be accepted in alleviation of her misconduct, as Maria would really have felt miserable to have breathed a reproach towards her parent, for whose happiness she was equally anxious as for her own.

Meanwhile Mrs. Fisher continued her instructions to her daughters Frances and Emma: her mind was more easy from the explanation which had taken place, and she felt better able to acquit herself of her maternal duties. She had the pleasure of hearing frequently from Mrs. Stewart, whose affection for Mrs. Fisher seemed to have increased from the knowledge of her misfortunes. At this period Mrs. Stewart herself experienced a good deal of adversity,—and

those who have suffered themselves are most alive to the distresses of others. The affection of Mrs. Hunter, to whom Maria's origin still remained unknown, had never abated towards Mrs. Fisher: she now spoke of taking her daughters alternately to live with her, that she might show them a little of the world. In this lady's round of acquaintance she counted the earl's family in Cavendish-square: and it so happened, that the first large party Frances was introduced to was at the earl of U——'s. This afforded Mrs. Fisher an opportunity of satisfying herself as to many points, upon which she now questioned Mrs. Hunter with more curiosity than she had shown for years. "Why really," said Mrs. Hunter in her answer, "I am glad to find you sometimes think of us worldlings; but I suppose you are only induced to make these inquiries about the earl of U—— because Frances accompanied me. However, I will reply to your questions as well as I am able.—The head of the family in Cavendish-square got a political lift

about five years ago:—prior to that time the title was only a barony. The present earl increased his consequence by marriage; though it has been whispered to me, that in order to do this he put away an innocent and beautiful wife. I do not in general give credit to reports; but I cannot help thinking that this is not wholly unfounded, my authority having been most respectable; indeed I entertain so bad an opinion of him that I limit myself to an annual visit. Lady Sarah, too, is lightly spoken of: she is young, fond of admiration, and the world says is neglected by her husband, who gives her very little of his company. They are said to live in a state of expense much exceeding their income. My lord is known to play deep;—to say the truth, I fear this is their last rout: it was chiefly owing to that I went; because I knew all their great acquaintance were making excuses, and I did not choose to be one of the first to hurt their feelings."

Mrs. Hunter's description of the earl

was drawn with great delicacy; his conduct having deserved much severer epithets than she had bestowed. As his marriage had merely been a matter of convenience, in which the heart had no share, it will not be extraordinary if the sentiment he felt towards lady S—— deserved rather the name of hatred than of love: to obtain a noble alliance, he had sacrificed one whom he knew to be virtuous from principle, blessed with an excellent understanding, and of the most complying and amiable disposition: he had united himself to a woman whose trifling mind was almost sure to render her the victim of flattery; her temper was bad, and her disposition vain and volatile: instead of endeavouring by gentle and engaging manners to win his affections, she expected to rule her husband. The first ten days of the honey-moon convinced them they must be miserable together. The earl therefore resolved to spend much of his time in Scotland, thinking the world would esteem him wise for preferring an

amiable mistress (for such he meant to style Maria) to a disagreeable wife. The disclosure made by Mr. Roper to Maria, and her conduct thereupon, finished this dream of happiness, and soured the earl's temper so much that he did not assume even the appearance of good-humour; but told the countess, that finding their dispositions were so opposite, it was best that her ladyship should amuse herself her way, whilst he pursued his own inclination. The lady seemed noways hurt at the proposal, and they were soon called a truly fashionable couple.

The earl was fond of notoriety: there was not a nobleman who played deeper, or lost his money with more easy indifference. To be considered a man of the most refined taste was his highest ambition:—his house, his equipage, every thing about him courted this distinction; and to this mania he sacrificed his fortune, health, and peace of mind. Lord U——'s neglect, so far from causing his lady to pine in sadness, rather

operated as a stimulus to show how far she dared to brave the world's opinion. The countess gave magnificent entertainments, played as deep as her husband, and became a blazing star in the circle of fashion. Tradesmen now asked in vain for their money. One expense followed another, until the estate was so incumbered that not an acre was free from mortgage: and when things had really reached their climax, this thoughtless pair agreed upon one subject—that they should give a masked ball, "to surprise the world," said Lady U——, "and show them we despise their paltry insinuations: they shall see we can make our exit with éclat—'Tis a pity, my lord, *you* cannot go to the continent," continued the lady: "for *my sake* surely some kind swain will have compassion on me, and take me to vegetate on love in a cottage."

"You talk very lightly of our misery," said the earl; "I suppose you think a certain honourable colonel will make you his prize? Have a care, madam; though I

cannot prevent your folly, I will defend my honour."

"I can recollect so much of the horrid ceremony of marriage, my lord, as to remember our promises were mutual:—you were the first to break them: I know you bestowed your heart on a wanton mistress —Thank goodness! mine is as yet my own, but it has stood a long siege; and when you entered I was considering upon the terms of capitulation:—perhaps, as an indifferent person, you, my lord, would be kind enough to advise me? My friends say you are accustomed to this sort of negotiation."

"This is trifling, Lady Sarah. I have no wish to quarrel with you, nor have I any objection to your scheme of the ball, provided you can put me in a way of raising the cash."

"You will be astonished, my lord, at my prudence in having done that already. The duchess, my mother, is hurt at the pitiful tales in circulation, and has given me

a thousand to blind the eyes of the public: besides, my lord, I was unusually lucky last week, and can furnish a moderate sum from my card purse."

"Would you, Lady Sarah, extend your charity to me, and give me two hundred for a tailor that has been dunning me these twelve months?"

"I would, my lord, but fear it would bring upon ourselves a list of plagues: if we pay one, others may be so foolish as to expect it. However, as you are so rational as to comply with my request, I will not be outdone—Here, my lord," giving him from her purse two hundred pounds.

The former hastened to dispose of his lady's bounty; the latter summoned her porter, and desired him to make out a list of all her visiting acquaintance and inform her of the number. Mr. Gifford brought to her ladyship the next morning a list of 1800 persons. The countess expressed her astonishment at finding it so small, and asked the porter whether he had counted

every name. He assured her ladyship that he had; and then received his orders to get that number of cards printed for a masked ball, to take place on the 4th of July, and fill them up according to the names he had given to her. "That will be a good time," said Lady U——, "just a month after the birth-day; my friends will have sufficient notice, and of course will stop in town." She then sent for upholsterers, &c. and staid at home one whole day to order the decorations, which were designed to vie with Eastern splendour. The next morning she called upon all her intimate friends, to recount to them the trouble and fatigue she had undergone the day before. Very soon the cards were issued, and one amongst the number to Mrs. Hunter. The next time she went to Sloane-street the subject was discussed. Mrs. Fisher herself conceived the strongest wish that her daughter should go: but on second thoughts every thing militated against it;—when she reflected on the manners exhibited on such occasions,

she wondered at her own want of consideration, and abandoned the idea. Mrs. Hunter also declined going, feeling no pleasure, she declared, in such dissipated scenes. A few days after the masquerade, appeared the following paragraph in a newspaper.

" A singular occurrence took place last " night at the splendid party in Cavendish- " square. A certain lady, the first personage " on the occasion, eloped with the Hon. " Colonel H——, in the characters of Har- " lequin and Columbine. The catastrophe " was whispered at supper, and the party " separated at an earlier hour than was in- " tended, so strongly did they feel for the " owner of the mansion. Colonel H——, " is the son of Lord D——: his stay in " England will be very short, as he is only " waiting for his appointment of general, " when he will join the victorious army."

Mrs. Fisher read the above with a degree of secret exultation, fancying it might tend to the re-union of her daughter with the earl. How far such a sentiment was de-

sirable, the sequel will develop. It must be owned that the thought was natural, if not allowable, in a mother so circumstanced. At present we will attend to the person on whom the world bestowed all its commiseration; and to those not immediately acquainted with the family anecdotes he certainly seemed deserving of pity. But as the author wishes her readers to be acquainted with the facts, she will not leave them ignorant of the truth. It has been already mentioned, that as soon as the earl and countess of U—— had discovered there was little probability of happiness to be expected from their union, they did not spend their time in endeavouring to accommodate each other's humour, but at once resolved to study their separate convenience. The former wished for nothing so much as that his lady would give him ground upon which he might seek a divorce. He therefore demeaned himself so far as to employ her footman to watch his lady's motions; telling him, should he see the least encouragement to a favoured

lover, to give him the earliest notice. The man was paid by the countess to attend and wait upon her: but as he received double the sum from his master to betray her, he served his lordship best, and acted the part of spy with as much or more assiduity than any man ever performed it. This watchful Argus remarked that Colonel H—— was admitted at an earlier hour than other visitors; he soon saw that he also staid later: he was ever ready to serve the colonel in delivering his billet-doux, and frequently admitted him when he had no orders to do so.

The colonel's attachment, however, received a damp by his being ordered abroad: but through powerful interest he contrived to shorten his absence by getting himself sent to England highly recommended for promotion. His visits in Cavendish-square were renewed on his return with greater frequency than before; and at last the wary footman by concealing himself in an apartment was actually an eye-witness to the infidelity of his mistress; and many times his

listening ear had heard the plan of their intrigue. The masquerade was intended solely to give them the means of flight :—the earl had been made acquainted with every particular before his last conversation with his lady. He secretly rejoiced in her fall; but thought it would make the conduct of the lovers more glaring, and give a better claim to heavy damages, to suffer them to make their premeditated escape.

When the sad tale was disclosed by the duke to the earl, with all the feeling and delicacy the occasion demanded, my lord assumed an air of utter surprise—feigned the agitation of a distracted husband—swore he would instantly pursue his treacherous friend, and either shoot him dead or fall himself! and actually set out with two pair of loaded pistols in his carriage; but went the opposite road to that he knew the fugitives had taken. Meanwhile the duke, alarmed at the apparent wildness of his son-in-law, followed —overtook him; and at last by gentle representations the earl suffered himself *(for*

his noble father's sake) to be prevailed on to return, and take the course of vengeance which the law allowed. The earl estimated the damages very high; and from pretended anxiety to bring the matter to a speedy close, he engaged his counsel to hasten the suit as much as possible, in order that he might know his doom—"Life," he said, "being a burthen whilst his honour lay unrevenged!" But in fact his hurry arose from a wish to ascertain the sum he should get from the colonel, and from a hope that after he should have obtained a divorce he should regain his former wife. Under pretence of being unable to remain on the spot where his mind had received so deep a wound, he resolved to travel for some months: so with the footman who had been his agent he commenced his tour to the North, which had really for its object the finding out of Maria;—for, having made in England every inquiry he could after her, without the least success, he supposed she had retired to some spot in Scotland: there then he went, having

first disposed of his effects in Cavendish-square, and given half the produce as a dividend to his creditors, with an agreement of surrendering 5000*l.* per annum out of his estate until the remainder of his debts should be paid. This step procured the earl the good opinion of all ranks of people: he was held up as a pattern of justice—no man could at this time be more popular than the earl of U——: the public heaped praises on his name. It is much to be regretted that hypocrisy should be so successful, since in all this parade of principle the earl had consulted only self-convenience.—His steward had let him into a secret, that such were the incumbrances upon his property that it must of necessity come shortly to the hammer. He was aware that Maria was too virtuous to live with him under the appellation of a mistress: he knew that himself would never condescend to avow his former conduct by living in London with her as his wife; yet was he convinced that in her society alone his happiness was to be secured:

and under the persuasion that he could induce her to accompany him abroad, he satisfied himself that he could acknowledge her there without being exposed to the animadversions of his friends, and exulted in the wisdom of the measures he had adopted, whereby he was enabled to save his estate —to preserve, nay more, to increase his popularity—at the same time that he should accelerate the completion of his wishes. On this occasion the earl retraced every step he had before taken in Scotland: but not hearing any news of Maria, he proceeded along the western coast of England, resolving to revisit Wales.

Three weeks had passed in fruitless inquiries; when, to satisfy himself somewhat for his disappointment, he made his friend the hospitable baronet another visit. There he recounted his twofold misery, in having lost a wife and a mistress, to a merry party just then assembled at the Park; who wondered he should regret the loss of the former, thinking a wife a heavy expense, which

he ought to thank any man to deliver him from:—as to a handsome mistress, that indeed was a sore case! and they all filled a bumper "To a speedy recovery." The baronet with great good humour insisted on the earl making the Park his head-quarters, from which he could send reconnoitring parties to every spot likely to be the haunt of a love-sick maid.

Whilst the earl partakes of the baronet's well-known hospitality, it will be necessary to inquire what became of the countess.

Lady Sarah and the colonel first steered their course to the lakes of Westmoreland, from thence to Cumberland; and had been only two days in the neighbourhood of Keswick, when he received his appointment of general, with a notice that he must immediately repair to London, for the purpose of receiving the orders of the commander in chief previous to his rejoining the army.

Each party regretted severely this premature separation, the duration of which was

very uncertain. The lady proposed accompanying the colonel; but that was impossible; for until the divorce could be obtained, without which he could not marry her, she must remain secluded from society. The great difficulty was, Where could she be placed during his absence? After naming various places, the Isle of Man occurred to him. He had heard of a few fashionables having been there: and they resolved, since they were so near it, to make some inquiry at Whitehaven. This plan was no sooner thought of than put into execution. At the inn they asked some questions which induced the landlady to send for the captain of the packet, who assured the colonel that he had taken over many persons of distinction, and enumerated lords, ladies, baronets, with a long list of colonels, majors, and captains. "What are all those people doing there?" asked Colonel H—.

"Amusing themselves, and spending their money," answered the captain. "Nobody stays there longer than he can help. You

would find the island very pleasant, sir, for a short time: I shall sail to-morrow, and can promise you good accommodation."

"We will think of it," said the colonel; "you can call in the morning."

The captain did so; and was informed that the gentleman and lady would sail with him. The captain intimated that they had better mark their births. Now it having been previously agreed upon that they should go by the name of Colonel Blandford and his lady, in that name their births were marked.

The wind was fair at the appointed time for sailing; and in a few hours Colonel Blandford and his lady were landed in the Isle of Man, with some others whose fashionable follies had led them to the same spot. On their landing at Douglas they were shown to the British Hotel, where they only intended to remain till such time as suitable lodgings could be procured. Colonel Blandford remarked that a gentleman, who he was informed was a Mr.

B——, one of the most respectable merchants in the town, often came to the inn. Pleased with his affable and friendly manner, he sought an opportunity of getting into conversation with him; and finding him to be a sensible, intelligent man, advised with him as to a comfortable lodging during his absence; saying, "he was obliged to go by return of the packet, in order to pursue his journey as speedily as possible to join the allied army on the continent. And as his wife did not feel she should be in spirits to partake of her usual society in the interim, he had brought her to Douglas as a place of retirement; and wished that he could get her admission into some genteel family of females where time might pass more cheerfully than alone." Mr. B—— immediately replied, "Mrs. Medcalf's is the pleasantest family I know; if the lady could be so fortunate as to be received there. Their terms, I believe, are much higher than elsewhere, but the lady would enjoy every domestic comfort." The

colonel observed, "Money is no object in the present case." The two gentlemen then agreed to make the inquiry together. The colonel was almost surprised at the truly fashionable manners of Mrs. Medcalf and her daughters—not that they evinced any levity of behaviour, but that they seemed easily polite and well bred. The Colonel left his name, and a reference to several people of distinction, whom he supposed Mrs. Medcalf was least likely to be acquainted with: and as he was at that time a general, he thought a detection of Lady Sarah to be next to impossible. Before he sailed she was fixed in her new residence, under the name of Mrs. Blandford. The first few days were passed by *her* in trying to gain a thorough insight into the different characters of her present associates; and by the Medcalfs and Miss Providence in devising every means of comfort for their new lodger, whose spirits seemed to be severely depressed: but this was considered only as natural in a lady whose husband had just

quitted her, and who was engaged in a cause where many had fallen in defence of their country. Each individual of this amiable family felt for her, and united their endeavours to divert her melancholy. Mrs. Blandford (for so she must continue to be called) was very uneven in her temper; sometimes observing a sullen silence for whole days together, then wishing for amusements with an avidity wholly inconsistent. But she was with those who construed every thing to her advantage:—when dull, they found a pleasure in endeavouring by various means to dissipate her sadness; when gay, they rejoiced; and by a walk diversified the scene, to prolong her cheerfulness. Miss Providence, who had most of her company, (the others being often employed in household affairs,) ventured to speak of the consolation to be derived from religion. This was a theme quite novel to Mrs. Blandford; and she rather smiled when she answered, "Were I to pray for a

month, I fancy it would not alter my situation."

"No," said Miss Providence, "your husband would still be abroad; but you would become better resigned to his absence."

"Perhaps so, my fair casuist," replied Mrs. Blandford; "and when I want a sermon you shall preach to me, for I really think truth from your lips would make many converts. But I believe it would do me more good if you would tell me your history. I may say there is something so interesting in your countenance, that my knowledge in physiognomy tells me that yours is more than a common story;—I know your wish is to dissipate my *ennui*;—you would effectually do it, in allowing me to be your confidante. Let us put on our hats and take a walk; and I will try to penetrate that little heart of yours."

The ladies arose: when, to the relief of Maria, Mrs. Medcalf met them at the par-

lour door, saying, as she placed some letters on the table, "There is food for your minds, ladies: A letter and a paper for Mrs. Blandford, and a letter for you, Miss Providence."

The ladies thanked her, and losing all thoughts of the walk reseated themselves. The letter to Mrs. Blandford was from Sir R. C. the intimate friend of the general; who had undertaken to inform her of every thing passing in the great world respecting her neighbours as well as her own affairs. He promised to give her early and faithful intelligence of every movement; commiserated her fate, which he considered as being "in vile durance bound;" and flattered her hopes of speedy emancipation, from the forward state of the divorce:—he vowed that had he wings he would fly over to see how she was employed;—declared he did not dare to own how much he idolized her, lest his head should be a mark for the general's pistol; and finished by assuring her

that the general set out for the continent as well as any man could do who had left his heart behind him, and that she was a pitiless woman to send a heartless soldier to the army.

Miss Providence's letter was from her mother; in which she related the sad catastrophe that had befallen the earl of U——; advised her dear Maria to consider well the conduct proper to be adopted, as it was not unlikely but that he would seek a reunion with her.

Poor Maria felt herself strangely affected by this news; and to avoid observation retired to her own apartment. When the family met at dinner Mrs. Blandford seemed elated, Maria depressed. "I think," said Mrs. Blandford to her, "it will now be my turn to cheer you. Come, I'll read you the paper after dinner."

"Indeed," replied Maria, "my letter contained intelligence that makes me low."

"Do not dwell upon it, then," said Mrs.

Blandford: and when the cloth was removed, taking the paper, she asked Maria "What subject do you like best?"

"I know so little of the world, all subjects are alike to me," replied Maria.

"We will begin then upon affairs of crim. con. which universally afford amusement. Here is a paragraph quite à propos."

"The late elopement from Cavendish-"square is much talked of; and damages "are said to be estimated at twenty thou-"sand pounds."

"*That* they will never get," said Mrs. Blandford very deliberately, as she laid the paper on her knees, seemingly calculating the sum: "Don't you think that too much for a woman?"

Mrs. Medcalf looked at her with a sternness which checked for a moment her thoughtless flippancy; the Miss Medcalfs felt shocked that any female could treat thus lightly a crime so degrading to her sex. But presently all eyes were fixed upon Miss Providence, who was nearly fainting:

she tried to get out of the room, but was obliged to accept the assistance of Miss Ann Medcalf before she could reach her chamber.

Those who are frail themselves are most apt to be suspicious of others. An idea instantly darted as quick as lightning across the mind of Mrs. Blandford, which she immediately imparted to Mrs. Medcalf in these words:

"I have heard that the earl of U—— had a mistress, whom he was chagrined to quit upon his marriage. She had been brought up in a convent.....Really all things put together, it strikes me that this Miss Providence may be the person. Her fainting was the consequence of hearing me read the allusion to Cavendish-square—Did you ever suspect her?"

"I really do not understand your insinuations," replied Mrs. Medcalf; "but I can answer for that young lady, that she is as innocent as my own daughters. I never saw a young person so exemplary in her

conduct;—it has given me the greatest satisfaction that my girls have met with an acquaintance every way so truly pious and amiable."

"It is easy for some characters to act the hypocrite," said Mrs. Blandford.

"For a few hours, or even days, it may," observed Mrs. Medcalf: "but a conduct so uniformly irreproachable as that of Miss Providence will stand the test of minute investigation;—nothing could make me for a moment suspect her of evil: nor will you, madam, when, like me, you have reasons to be convinced of her worth."

Mrs. Blandford, perceiving the earnestness of her hostess, feigned to change her opinion; but in fact still thought the same. The idea had generated in her own evil mind, and her depraved heart vouched for its correctness.

Next morning the breakfast table brought all the family together. Miss Providence had nearly recovered her usual looks, and Mrs. Blandford was in high spirits;

—her mind finding a malignant satisfaction in having, as she hoped, discovered a frail sister in the person of Maria. Bent on obtaining from herself the avowal of her guilt, she renewed her invitation to walk. As soon as breakfast was over, the two ladies sallied forth. No sooner had they left the street, than Mrs. Blandford thought it expedient to overwhelm her antagonist at once, by artfully pretending to a knowledge she did not possess, and with unblushing effrontery thus began her attack:

"Miss Providence—what think you of your old friend the earl of U——?"

Maria, more dead than alive, to prevent herself from falling, hastily caught Mrs. Blandford's arm. The latter, secretly exulting in the apparent success of her plan, and thinking herself degraded in being the companion of her husband's mistress, instantly released her arm, exclaiming in a tone of contempt, "What ails the girl?" Mistaken woman! to look upon herself as less guilty than Maria. Had the latter even

deserved the character her accuser was so ready to impute to her, yet how could Lady Sarah think it a less offence to violate vows pledged in the sight of God and man! Alas! how fatally ere long will her delusion vanish!—The day will at length arrive when she will know, by woful experience, that the sin of adultery far surpasses most others in heinousness, and that its fatal consequences often place a woman upon the level with a murderer.

The repulse Maria had received at first struck her with astonishment; but in a moment she imagined Mrs. Blandford to have recognised her as having lived with the earl, and that she now looked upon her as *his mistress!* A sense that this was possible recalled her strength of mind; and with anxious earnestness to remove so foul a suspicion, she hastily replied, "I am uncertain, madam, what has occasioned your present behaviour. If it proceed from a belief that I have acted improperly respecting the earl or any other person, I think it

right to declare that I never yet have been guilty of an action I should blush to avow."

Mrs. Blandford's passion was roused, and she retorted, "Women like you seldom think they have reason to blush."

"I must insist upon it, madam," said Maria, "that you inform me of the reason of this conversation."

Mrs. Blandford, with a look of the keenest reproach and anger, said, "What would you answer if Lady Sarah were to question you upon your intimacy with the earl?"

To that question Maria with firmness replied, "If I knew her to be Lady Sarah, I should not hesitate to tell the truth."

"Then behold Lady Sarah!...I am that unfortunate woman, who, owing to the neglect of my husband, am now become an object of pity to some, and of scorn to others! And I ask you—Did you not live with Lord U—— in Scotland?"

"I did."

"And have you not alienated his affection from me, his lawful wife?—Have I not a

right to hate, to detest the sight of you as my greatest enemy?"

"I can assure you, Lady Sarah, that from the day I first learnt the earl's engagement to you I quitted him. Never from that hour have I beheld him, or had any communication with him whatever. And moreover, if your ladyship will do me the favour to call on Mrs. Stewart, she will confirm what I have now stated—That I am in no way guilty of an *improper* connexion with the earl. She is perfectly acquainted with my situation; and, as a person of known respectability, I doubt not your ladyship would credit her assertion."

"I dare say," replied Lady Sarah, "you have imposed upon Mrs. Stewart as well as upon the family you are now with:—they truly think you immaculate! However, if *you* know how to be silent—so do *I*. It suits my convenience to be here just at present: I should not choose to have my title buzzed about in the absence of my protector.

Do you therefore keep *your* secret, I will keep *mine*."

Maria felt unable to reply. Never had her feelings been so poignantly affected. And however much she wished to justify herself, her regard for the earl, and a recollection of the promise she had made him, bound her to silence. Religion commanded her to shun even the appearance of evil :—yet, situated as she was, she felt it meritorious not to vindicate herself.

The two ladies continued to walk homeward—no longer arm-in-arm, but slowly following each other, their thoughts being in direct opposition. Lady Sarah persisted in believing Maria to be the mistress of Lord U——, consequently the object of her contempt and hatred ;—whilst the inexperienced Maria sincerely pitied Lady Sarah, and was musing in her mind in what manner, after the burst of passion should be over, she would urge Lady Sarah to acknowledge her fault, and to endeavour by future

good conduct to regain her place in society. Thus were the minds of the two ladies employed when, as they involuntarily stopped in that part below Fort Anne facing the pier, they perceived a boat as if coming from a vessel in the bay. They gazed on the prospect before them:—the smooth expanse of water, the distant vessels moving slowly on its surface, and the genial stillness that reigned around, for a moment tranquillized their bosoms—those bosoms destined to feel the earthquake's shock! for in a few minutes the boat was alongside the pier; when a gentleman landed, whom, upon turning his face to address the captain, the two ladies instantly knew to be the earl of U——. Words cannot describe their agitation. Lady Sarah first recovered her speech by saying, "Well, as it is not natural for a man to seek a wife with whom he is about to be divorced, I suppose, madam, you must be the object of the earl's search:—I cannot now believe one word you have said of your innocence—God keep me from hypocrisy!

I think it my duty, however, to inform Mrs. Medcalf, that she may not be imposed upon so far as to be led to make her house the scene of a clandestine correspondence with a married man—Remember, madam, the law has not divorced us yet."

"And most sincerely do I wish it never may," replied Maria.

"Hold thy licentious tongue," vociferated Lady Sarah.

"Hear me!" exclaimed Maria as she hastened after Lady Sarah, to whom rage had given activity.—"Hear me give you my solemn word that I will quit this place with the first vessel—that I will not admit Lord U—— should he seek an interview—and, moreover, that I will proceed direct into Worcestershire. I was only waiting till a peace should be made with France, that I might return to my convent, there to make my vows as a nun:—in Worcestershire is a house of the same order; I will retire to that, until my own in Paris can receive me. Happy shall I think myself to quit a

world in which I have experienced nothing but unkindness and misery. O Lady Sarah! did you know the events of my life—how various, how unmerited my sufferings—your anger would be changed into pity for my fate."

"I was considering," said Lady Sarah, "whether I shall tell the Medcalfs who I am."

"I think it better not," replied Maria: "but I am unable to advise you. I am going to consult Mrs. Stewart about my journey. If you are inclined to confide in her, I am certain she will not betray you, not even to her husband: she would direct you for the best. The vicissitudes she herself has experienced have made her well acquainted with the world: she is sensible, well bred; and the kindness of her disposition is only equalled by the pleasure she feels in rendering a service to a friend."

"I should feel very awkward," said Mrs. Blandford, (for being in the street she desired Maria not to call her by her title,)

"to introduce myself so abruptly. Suppose you were to say, that I request the favour of speaking with her for five minutes?"

"I will," said Maria; and they separated:—one to call at Mrs. Stewart's, the other to return to her lodging. At dinner the ladies met again; when our heroine informed Mrs. Blandford that she expected a visit from Mrs. Stewart that evening, who at the same time meant to do herself the honour of calling upon her. Mrs. B—— seemed pleased: not one word was spoken relative to the morning occurrences. The family were too much employed at home to make idle visits for the purpose of hearing news; so that there was little danger that the earl of U——'s name should be mentioned, which both ladies dreaded to hear.—At five o'clock Mrs. Stewart knocked. Her first visit was to Mrs. B——, esteeming it a politeness due from her to a stranger who had expressed a wish for her acquaintance.

She had not been long with Mrs. B——,

before the latter, with all that ease of manner and apparent affability which she knew so well how to assume when she had any point to gain, informed Mrs. Stewart of her present situation; mollifying the part she had acted, by relating her husband's neglect of her, and exaggerating his attachment to a mistress, whom she alleged to have robbed her of his affection: and then mentioned the earl's arrival in Douglas. Mrs. Stewart expressed her hope that his coming portended a reconciliation; and exhorted Mrs. B—— to behave in a conciliating manner; representing to her the degraded situation in which a woman was placed by a divorce, even in the eyes of her seducer; and assured her, that if her husband could overlook the past, it would soon be forgotten by the world. This reasoning did not meet with Mrs. B——'s approbation, who seemed averse to a reconciliation, and declared her wish to avoid the earl by going immediately to another spot.

"If, my dear madam," continued Mrs.

Stewart, "you really do not wish to meet your husband in an amicable way, your departure from hence seems most advisable; since you would certainly feel very uncomfortable from the conspicuous light in which his arrival may place you; as be assured the story will get abroad. Inquisitiveness is a failing which is but too general—of course this island is not exempt; and the strangers who come here being mostly dissipated persons, who neither seek nor wish for occupation, scandal will of necessity prevail—so pleasing is it to perverted minds to find others equally bad *. But do not act precipitately; consider well:—if you think of any thing in which I can serve you, I shall find the greatest pleasure in executing your

* Such was the state of society in the year 1813. It was owing to the injurious example these immoral characters presented to the well disposed natives, that the Manks legislature prayed the English government to remove this stigma from their island; choosing rather to lose in their commerce, than to expose their youth to the danger of immorality, which a continual scene of dissipation afforded.

commands; and should you resolve upon going, perhaps I may be able to inform you of an agreeable companion."

Mrs. Stewart was obliged to shorten her visit, having business to transact for Maria, who had resolved to quit the island by the first opportunity; and which was afforded by a packet that was to sail the following night, "wind and weather permitting."

Strange as it may seem, the two wives actually quitted Douglas in the same vessel. It was about eleven on a fine autumnal night when Mr. Stewart conducted the two ladies on board. They had to pass a great number of well-dressed people, who were induced by the weather to remain on the pier to see who were going to England. Among these was an elegant-looking stranger standing alone. By the trembling of each arm which Mr. Stewart held under his, he had no doubt but that this was the earl of U——. They were obliged to pass very near him; and to avoid being known, each with the hand which was disengaged

held a handkerchief up to her face, which was further concealed by a veil. They could not escape his scrutinizing looks. He no doubt recollected the figure of each lady: but from the great improbability that any occurrence could have brought them acquainted, and in the Isle of Man too, he thought he must be mistaken. Mr. Stewart having seen both the ladies to their births in the cabin left them, and took a turn on the pier, his mind occupied in conjecture concerning his fair friends. By the agitation each had shown on seeing the earl, he concluded they must be very uncomfortable; and thought within himself, "Had there been only one female, and she had betrayed her feelings so far at the sight of this gentleman, it would have been an act of kindness to have informed him of it;—but as it is, I must be silent." So finding that the vessel would shortly disappear from his view, he bent his course homeward to tell Mrs. Stewart what had happened.

The next morning, whilst Mrs. Stewart

went after breakfast to acquaint Mrs. Medcalf with the true cause of her lodgers having left the house in such apparent haste, the earl of U—— called on Mr. Stewart; and after many apologies, and assuring Mr. Stewart that nothing less than a matter on which his whole happiness depended could have induced him, as a stranger, to take so great a liberty, he asked "who were the two ladies he had conducted to the vessel the preceding night?"

Mr. Stewart, confident that the earl's question related to Lady Sarah, and attributing his anxiety to a desire of being reconciled to her—at the same time ignorant of Maria's acquaintance with the earl—thought he was acting the part of a peacemaker in telling his lordship, "That one was a Miss Providence (a friend of Mrs. Stewart's), and the other, whom he had the honour of being introduced to only the same day, he understood to be Lady Sarah U——, known in Douglas by the name of Mrs. Blandford." The earl expressed his thanks;

said he would only ask one more question—"Did the ladies mean to travel together in England, and was their intention to go to London?" Here Mr. Stewart declared his ignorance of their route further than Liverpool; but said he would inquire of Mrs. Stewart, and would inform his lordship of the result. The earl then requested Mr. Stewart would favour him by taking his wine with him that evening, and said he should expect him at seven o'clock.

When Mrs. Stewart met her husband at dinner, and was told of the visit he had received, with the particulars of the conversation, she could not help chiding him for suffering his good-nature to lead him into the commission of a serious piece of mischief. "Had you told me, my dear," said the husband, "that there was a secret in the business, I should not have discovered their names at all;—this is the consequence of hiding things from me."

"When a person places confidence in another, it would be an act of injustice to

betray it; you yourself would despise me were I guilty of so base an action."

"That fine speech is not at all to the purpose," retorted the husband. "I say that married people should have no secrets for each other. And now, that you have got me into this hobble, pray tell me how I am to get out of it?"

"You have now, Mr. Stewart, only to say the truth—That you did not know Lady Sarah till yesterday, and therefore it was not natural to expect she would inform you of the particulars of her journey. As for myself, I do assure you I am ignorant of their route; but I think they are going to London. However, of this I am certain, that Lady Sarah would not act becomingly were she to meet her lord;—on that account it will be rendering them a service to keep them asunder. At all events, do not let *us* trouble ourselves with their affairs; they will not thank us; and we do not know the consequences of interfering."

The earl had now gained almost all the

information he could expect. That Lady Sarah and Maria were together, appeared to him the most surprising of all the extraordinary events he had ever met with. He knew it would be to no purpose to meet Maria when accompanied by Lady Sarah: so after advising with the valet (his faithful counsellor and partner in evil), the earl dispatched this trusty messenger that very evening to Liverpool, a herring-smack being very opportunely going out, and in which James had been some hours under weigh when the earl and Mr. Stewart broached their first bottle of claret at the British Hotel.—As they would doubtless finish eight at least, there will be time to inquire after the fair travellers.

It has been already said that Mr. Stewart had seen the ladies to their births. No sooner had he left the cabin, in which they were alone, than both of them exclaimed at once, "I am sure it was he!" No name was mentioned. "I wish," continued Lady Sarah, "I had spoken to him, How it would

have annoyed him!—what a fool I was to miss the opportunity! what a touching scene for the newspapers! And then the description of *the fine emotions of the earl of U— on meeting Lady Sarah, by mere accident, on the pier of Douglas in the Isle of Man!* Oh! it would have been exquisite food for a novel!" and she laughed immoderately; when the entrance of other passengers changed the conversation. The vessel was going out of the harbour, and the captain came to collect passes, as they are called—a printed paper signed by the governor, containing leave for the bearer (naming the person) to go to England or elsewhere, with one of which it is necessary for every passenger to be furnished. Notwithstanding this precaution, many have found means to escape; which circumstance would naturally diminish the confidence of the Manks people towards strangers. The ladies suffered a good deal from sickness during the night: they met with great attention from the gentlemen; for though they were not the only

females, they were by far the handsomest. At seven next morning they were advised to go upon deck, which they did; and found themselves much refreshed by the air and a cup of coffee.

They landed in Liverpool about twelve. Lady Sarah suffered herself to be persuaded by a very genteel-looking man, from whom she had received many marks of kindness on her passage, to go to the George Inn. Maria having observed the very particular attention of the stranger to Lady Sarah, and fearing from her former misconduct that some further impropriety might be the consequence, proposed that they should ask the captain to recommend them to an inn. But Lady Sarah would not hear of this, neither was she willing that they should separate; so that Maria silently acquiesced.

When the ladies retired to change their dress, Lady Sarah said, "Now, Miss Providence, that we are alone, let us settle the plan of our journey. And first, remember

to call me Mrs. Blandford; I should not like to be known: I am *incog.* Unprotected as we are, I really think the stage coach is preferable for us to a post-chaise. Suppose we get our beau to inquire about the coaches?"

"Where," asked Maria, "do you think of fixing yourself?"

"I should not wish to go to London—To be there without enjoying the dear ecstatic pleasures I have been accustomed to, would be worse than to be exiled to Siberia. But where can I go in my present situation? As soon as the divorce is obtained which sets me at liberty from my present odious fetters, I shall marry the general, and again enjoy my own place in society."

"You say you would rejoice in being relieved from your present fetters;—why then, Lady Sarah, would you forge new ones?"

"Because, child, when I become the spouse of the gay general, I expect to be light as air; I shall not feel I am bound:—he is all ease and elegance; and so dotingly

fond of me, that when I nod, he will obey."

"I wish, dear madam, he may continue as polite a husband as he is a lover. But forgive me, if I say I never heard of a happy marriage after a divorce, during the lives of the parties. Though you have broken your vow to one man, and he does not choose to forgive it, I cannot think it right you should pledge yourself to another. Religion argues much against it, and I think reason opposes it in every sense."

"Miss Providence, I am astonished that you, of all people, should insinuate this godly doctrine:—Look at yourself; not all your preaching can convince me you have not been my lord's mistress. I am sure *your* agitation the other night exceeded *mine*: you know you trembled so, you were near falling when you were handed into the vessel."

"Most solemnly I assure you, Lady Sarah, that I never was his mistress. Appearances, which I could easily do away,

are, I grant, against me. The happiness of another, and not my own, compels me to silence—however much I may be exposed to your unmerited censure by observing it."

"Will your immaculate ladyship then swear to me that you never will live with the earl?"

"I never swear, Lady Sarah; but I pledge you my word that I never will live as mistress to the earl of U——. Moreover, that I will now proceed to London, whence I will pursue my journey into Worcestershire; and there remain until my own convent in Paris can receive me."

Lady Sarah was, or seemed to be, satisfied with this promise. She then resumed the subject of their journey; and asked Maria whether she knew of any situation that would suit her. To which Maria replied, "There are many delightful retreats in Wales, some of which I have seen; and if you wish it, I will do myself the pleasure of accompanying you to Chester; there you will be on the borders of Wales, and can

pursue your inquiries for a suitable residence." Lady Sarah acceded to the offer with thanks; and they resolved to learn what time the coach would set out next day.

By the time this arrangement had been made, a servant announced that dinner was ready; saying, "The gentleman who came with them was below."

It was not long before the ladies made their appearance: Mrs. Blandford looking so elegant, so enchantingly captivating, and Maria so bewitching, that he wondered where two such beauties could have emerged from: and as he was an independent citizen of the world, with no business but what his amusement created, he resolved to ingratiate himself into their good opinion, and not to quit them till he should be compelled. At dinner our beau was assiduously attentive to each. He considered himself particularly fortunate in being the protector of two such fair ones; yet at times he almost wished there had been but one. His admiration was divided;—Mrs.

Blandford, he thought, from a certain something in her countenance, would prove the easiest conquest; and immediately his heart decided in favour of Maria—for mankind naturally view that as most desirable which is the most difficult to be obtained. During dinner Mr. Fielding (for this was the name of the gentleman) proposed to the ladies that he should have the honour of conducting them to the theatre that evening. Mrs. Blandford was delighted at the least prospect of any thing like pleasure, and directly expressed herself ready to accept his offer: "It will pass away a tedious evening," said she; "and to-morrow this lady and myself purpose going to Chester; —perhaps, sir, you would be good enough to inquire for us at what time the coach will set out? for, as we shall not then have your protection, we shall find ourselves safer in a public conveyance than in posting it."

Mr. Fielding begged, if they preferred the latter mode, that they would permit him to be a third in a chaise; protested the

obligation would be on his side, by being allowed the honour of continuing their protector to the end of their journey. "It is perfectly immaterial to me," continued the gentleman, "what road I take. I generally spend three months in the year in travelling about. A month ago I was at Parkgate; and there meeting with a friend who wished to see the Isle of Man, I went with him:—now whether I return to Parkgate or go a hundred miles further, it will only be a portion of my ramble. I think my better stars prevailed in the present instance; and as long as you, ladies, will permit me to attend you, I shall feel myself supremely happy in endeavouring to make myself useful."

It was then decided in favour of a chaise to Chester: and Mr. Fielding left the parlour to give his orders respecting it.

In his absence Maria said, "May I beg of you, dear madam, to give up all thoughts of the play? I have never entered a theatre in my life; and although I should not think it wrong in any other person to do so, yet

I really could not feel comfortable if I went; —therefore I hope you will excuse me."

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Blandford, "I would not wish you to act against your conscience on my account; but as I have no such scrupulous notions, I do not see the necessity for me to deny myself a little innocent amusement:—so I will excuse your going, if you are ready to excuse my leaving you alone."

"Pray do not mind me," said Maria; "I shall do very well—if you think there is no impropriety in your going with this gentleman."

"Really, Miss Providence, it is time you were in a convent, if you make such mountains of mole-hills."

Mr. Fielding was now returned; and seemed chagrined, though not really displeased, that he had only one lady to escort. In a few minutes a coach he had politely ordered came to the door; and with many apologies to Maria the gentleman and lady

set out in quest of amusement; whilst poor Maria felt no regret on her own account, but a great deal on Lady Sarah's: for, little as she had seen of the world, and unaccustomed as she was to fashionable gallantry, her own correct mode of thinking made her perfectly sensible to the inconsiderateness of such conduct.

The coach brought back Lady Sarah and Mr. Fielding between eleven and twelve; both apparently in high spirits, which they kept up during the evening; Lady Sarah being of the number of females who exert all their arts to please when in the society of the other sex. This night she had a point to gain with our heroine, which soon discovered itself after the ladies had reached their chamber. Lady Sarah opened the business by saying, "I have been talking over our journey, Miss Providence, with Mr. Fielding, who tells me that Parkgate is a very eligible place for me. By taking up my abode at a respectable lodging-house,

of which he described several, I can live retired, at the same time that I shall not be excluded from a little snug society: and as we can go there without passing through Chester, I have resolved to take the nearest road. This being the case, I would not by any means be the occasion of your going out of your way: I shall have an excellent protector in Mr. Fielding, who really is a conversable, and what even *you* would call a steady man:—you cannot imagine how respectful he has been in his conduct towards me to-night; much more grave, I assure you, than he is when you and I are with him."

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied Maria. "I am acquainted myself with but few men; but I have read of and heard them described as being very hard to penetrate, on which account I think it incumbent upon all females to be cautious."

"I have had opportunities of studying them," replied Lady Sarah; "and I never yet have been mistaken in the conclusions

I have drawn; and am confident that I have nothing to fear for myself in this instance.—All my thoughts now," continued she, "are occupied in considering how you will proceed. I think you had better take the coach from hence. Mr. Fielding left me for a short time in the theatre to inquire the hour it would set out—for he is very anxious about your comfort; and he strongly recommended one that goes at seven in the morning; but if you take that, you know, you must remain here till the day after to-morrow; and as no female in my situation should stay at an inn a moment longer than she can avoid, I dare say you will be charitable enough to excuse my leaving you here. I am particularly desirous to get out of this public town; it would be distressing to me to be known."

Maria seemed to agree with her companion in all she had proposed. But little as she knew of the world, she was fully aware how indecorous Lady Sarah's conduct must appear in thus committing herself to the

protection of a stranger. She forbore all remonstrance, because she knew it would be vain, and tried to check every sentiment which breathed a suspicion of deeper misconduct. The next day, however, she observed with sorrow the good understanding which seemed to exist between Lady Sarah and Mr. Fielding: she treated him with a familiarity and confidence which should only be the result of tried friendship; whilst he could with difficulty restrain within the bounds of decorum the delight with which his easy conquest filled his bosom. At one o'clock Maria saw the chaise depart from the door, with a silent prayer on her part that Lady Sarah might never repent the having formed this hasty acquaintance.

At seven the next morning our heroine went to the office in Redcross-street, attended by the porter with her trunk. Here she took her seat in the coach with two elderly females and a young Oxonian, who soon appeared struck with the lovely countenance of Maria, on which he fixed his

eyes with a confidence that was truly distressing to her. Little conversation passed;—our heroine being one of those who can find sufficient enjoyment in their own reflections from the objects around them. The ladies talked of a sister they were going to visit at Prescot, which indicated that their journey would terminate at that town;—a piece of intelligence that Maria heard with regret, the young Oxonian with pleasure. In two hours the ladies left the coach. As soon as they were gone the gentleman spoke for the first time, saying, as he familiarly seized the hand of Maria, "Don't you think, ma'am, with me, that old women ought to stay at home?"

"In that respect," answered Maria, hastily withdrawing her hand, "I differ, sir, from you in opinion."

A silence ensued, which shortly after was again broken by the gentleman asking Maria whether she had visited the Liverpool theatre. On her answering in the negative, he continued, "I suppose you merely pass-

ed through the town, perhaps are lately arrived from a voyage?"

"I spent some days in Liverpool, sir," was the answer; uttered in such mild accents that her fellow-traveller began to conjecture that Maria was only bashful; and venturing once more to take her hand he imprinted on it a fervent kiss. This was so quickly done, that our heroine had no time to remonstrate. It was the first insult she had ever experienced; and colouring with resentment that any person should have dared to offer it, she said with more asperity than she had ever before used, "You are the first person, sir, who has dared to make me feel the want of a protector. I am unaccustomed to such rude conduct; and if, sir, you give me further reason to complain, I shall order the coachman to stop while I get on the outside."

He instantly threw himself on his knees, and declared his sorrow for what he had done. "I meant not to insult you, believe

me. But, my dear lady," continued he, "you must live secluded from the haunts of men if such a lovely face as yours is to pass unnoticed;—if man is not to make his offering at the shrine of beauty. Yes, loveliest...."

To the great relief of Maria this rhapsody was interrupted by the entrance of an elderly gentleman, whom with a smile she seemed to invite to a place beside her. It was instantly accepted; and a cheerful conversation soon began between them, to the great annoyance of the gay Oxonian, who was surprised that any young lady could be amused with the solid observations of an old man, in preference to the soft nonsense he had been in the habit of whispering into every female ear.

Nothing material took place during the rest of the journey, which finished on the second evening. Arrived at Charing-cross, our heroine ordered a hackney coach to be called, into which her trunk was placed, and she proceeded to her old lodging in Sloane-street. The landlady was pleased to see

her, but regretted that the rooms Maria used to occupy were now engaged. On discussing the subject, however, it was suggested that, since Miss Providence meant only to stop a few days, she would possibly condescend to sit with her and her daughters in a back parlour, as she could be accommodated with a bed-chamber. This was immediately agreed to, and the trunk was taken up stairs.

That day Maria gave to rest. The next morning she took her old walk to Warwick-street, and after prayers requested an interview with Mr. Roper, who was somewhat astonished at her sudden appearance: but on hearing her reasons, he approved of her conduct in the strongest terms.—She related every material circumstance respecting her meeting with Lady Sarah—kindly suppressing her real opinion of that lady—and concluded by informing Mr. Roper, that she now came to advise with him on the best method of obtaining permission from the ladies of her religious order in Worcester-

shire, to reside with them until her own convent in Paris could receive her. To this representation he made the following answer: "It does not appear to me at the moment that you can be received into any convent as a nun; because, my good lady, you are under the control of your husband. This second marriage you have always been sensible was unlawful; he is seeking a divorce from that marriage:—it is very possible that the earl may have seen his error, and that he now wishes to repair it. Should that be the case, you are bound by the vows you have made to live with him. Only consider the nature, the words of your obligation:—You promised indulgence to his defects, obedience to his will, and fidelity to his bed. These several obligations you swore to keep until death—There was no stipulation, no agreement, that a breach of any of these promises should dissolve the contract:—under every change, under every exigency, you remain still bound by the same laws; and certainly nothing can cancel the

sacred tie. You ought to hold yourself ready to perform your matrimonial duties when called upon: and though the frailty of human nature has occasioned a separation for a time, you have promised to love your husband under every circumstance; and you must try to regain his affection by conciliating manners:—Avoid any reproaches, which could only add bitterness to his feelings, without effecting any change in him or benefit to yourself. An uniformly virtuous conduct, by rendering yourself worthy of all his esteem and love, will best convince him of the power of goodness:—his admiration of your principles will imperceptibly lead him to be virtuous; and you will experience the first of all possible enjoyments—that of restoring the man you love to the favour of his Maker! Think of the reward, and let nothing deter you from persevering in the arduous task. I dare foretell all will end as you wish. To convince you that it is the earl's intention to do you justice, I will inform you that he has visited every

spot which he thought likely to have been your residence;—that he is now in the Isle of Man, where he went to seek you: and finding that you had quitted it, he wrote to me by a messenger who arrived in town only yesterday. I promised to make inquiry after you: but in fact I still supposed you to be in the island: I expect the servant to-morrow for my answer. In the present posture of affairs I approve of your going into Worcestershire, and there remaining till the divorce is obtained. I know the superior well; she will be exceedingly happy to receive you: you shall take a letter from me to acquaint her that you wish an asylum with her till some law business now impending shall be finally concluded. Meantime I will write to the earl, and will let him know that I have seen you; and that having asked my advice, I had recommended to you to reside in a house of religious ladies till the business now in agitation shall be decided. When that shall have taken place, I trust he will be re-united to you in the face of the world."

Maria attended to every word Mr. Roper had spoken. She was at first surprised; but as she listened she became convinced that his arguments were founded on religion and equity:—to her it seemed wrong to doubt what he had advanced; and when he had finished speaking, she assured him that she would act according to his advice. Mr. Roper inquired when she should be ready for her journey. She answered that, having only one friend in London whom she wished to see, she should be ready on the morrow. He promised to call early in the morning to tell her the hour the coach would set out.

The rest of that day Maria dedicated to her mother, to whom she had previously written, with a request that she would come to her lodgings, deeming it improper for herself to go to Mrs. Fisher's.

It would be impossible for language to convey an adequate description of the first interview between the mother and daughter, circumstanced as were Mrs. Fisher and

Maria—Suffice it to say, that four hours passed imperceptibly away in mutual explanations, and expressions of regard. Maria related the advice of Mr. Roper, and had the pleasure to receive her mother's sanction for every thing. When they parted, Mrs. Fisher could not help expressing her exultation at the hopes of soon seeing her child in that station she seemed designed by nature to fill. And though it pained her that she could not openly acknowledge her daughter, she felt a proud satisfaction at her conduct and her virtues.

At nine the following morning Maria left London for Worcestershire, where she arrived without encountering any thing worth relating. The letter she took from Mr. Roper procured her a friendly reception, and she soon found herself comfortable in the society of the good nuns. Often did she wish that the earl would not remove her, so happy did she feel in her present retreat. All her youthful scenes seemed now revived; and she got so much into the ways and habits

of her associates, that when, two months after her admission, she received a letter from Mr. Roper, she trembled on breaking the seal, lest it should contain a summons for her return into the world, where she had experienced little else than misery and disappointment.

LETTER XX.

FROM THE REVEREND MR. ROPER TO MISS PROVIDENCE.

MADAM,

London, Warwick-street.

I SIT down to give you, as I promised, a faithful account of all that has transpired respecting the earl of U——. He arrived in London within ten days after you left it, and requested an interview with me. I answered his lordship's note, by an early visit the next morning at his lodgings in Albemarle-street. I found him surrounded with papers relating to the divorce, which had gone through a hearing, and was to be brought forward again soon. On the first examination of the witnesses, James, by some prevarications, brought upon himself a cross-examination, in which he discovered several circumstances he had intended to conceal; and which made it clearly appear that the earl was privy to Lady Sarah's

acquaintance with the colonel; and in consequence the public opinion seems to be that the damages will be very trifling. The earl showed the greatest anxiety to learn the place of your residence. I told him the whole of your plan; but said nothing of my own advice as to your conduct, thinking it better first to see in what manner he meant to conduct himself. He was very urgent that I should give him your address, and I now write to request your permission to do so. As there can be no impropriety in knowing the earl's proposals, I think you may indulge him with the request: it would give you time for reflection, and for expostulation should it be needful.

Your friend Mrs. Hunter has not yet returned from Bath: I am sorry to add, that the general account of her health is very unfavourable. I must beg, madam, you will do me the favour to make my best respects to the worthy ladies you are with. With my earnest wishes for your happiness, and my fervent prayers that Providence may di-

rect you in all things, I remain, madam, your obedient humble servant,

JOSEPH ROPER.

This letter Miss Providence answered immediately, giving Mr. Roper the permission he wished respecting the earl; from whom she received the following, a few days after.

LETTER XXI.

FROM THE EARL TO THE COUNTESS OF U——.

DEAR MADAM,

WERE it possible for me to express the misery my mind has endured for the last four years, I should hope to create an interest in your compassionate bosom. I dare only to address you in the style of a penitent, whose conscience has never ceased to reproach him, from the hour that he abandoned the best and most beloved of wives! Yes, dear madam, at the moment of desertion I knew that I was sacrificing my own happiness to the imperious mandates of a father, and to the false glare of human grandeur. Nay more, that from the dread of his displeasure I was sacrificing the happiness of the only woman I loved! Can you, madam, after this sincere confession of my guilt, receive and pardon a man who feels he never can forgive

himself! It is your goodness and your religious principles which give me cause to hope. I know that you possess firmness to resist every allurement to pleasure—every incitement to passion;—that you will not even allow inclination, or the dictates of conjugal love, to bias your heart one atom from the path of rectitude. You have been the votary of religion from your birth;—its influence is benign, and we are told "its ways are full of pleasantness and peace."—Its mild precepts have taught you mercy; you have extended it to all within your sway;—and surely you will not deny the prayer of one whom you promised to forgive and to cherish! Of all the attributes with which man is endowed, none elevates his soul so near his Creator as the exercise of mercy. It insures a double reward, since it is known to bless him who gives and him who takes. Oh! may you feel the full extent of this blessing!—Knowing that you might suffer in the eyes of this misjudging world were I

now to obtain the felicity of an interview, I sacrifice that ardent wish to show you that I am capable of resisting the first of human enjoyments when it militates against your peace of mind, and the decorum which the world has a right to expect. I did not even seek an opportunity of writing to you until the first hearing of the suit now impending had taken place, and that I had sure reasons for supposing that the next hearing would conclude the business. When that event shall be finally decided, I hope you will permit me to see and to convince you of my sincerity. In the mean time I shall consult Mr. Roper in what manner I had best proceed in order to prove my integrity to you and to the world. If he judge it needful that we should be re-married, I am ready to fulfill the obligation, and am desirous that the ceremony shall be performed publicly, as the only reparation to the best of women!..... But whither is my imagination leading me? First, dear madam, grant your sanction to

my thoughts. I implore an early and a favourable answer. Drive not to despair one who is sensible of his existence only in the hope he entertains that you will permit him to prove himself, for the residue of his days, a truly penitent and affectionate huband.

C—— U——.

LETTER XXII.

MARIA TO THE EARL OF U——

House near Worcester.

My Lord,

I RECEIVED the honour of your letter, and will candidly acknowledge I opened it with all the feelings of an injured wife. Those feelings, which it has been my study for the last four years to suppress, all revived at the sight of your well-remembered hand. Nor were those the only sentiments my bosom owned:—affection seemed also to beat with its former force. Indeed, my lord, I could never divest myself of the persuasion that I was your wife; and have always conducted myself under all circumstances as such. Your approval of my conduct gives me pleasure; and I hope your lordship will not think me unnecessarily fastidious in remaining silent for the present respecting my future prospect of reunion. As soon as the business your lordship is en-

gaged in shall be decided, I will fully answer the question. But there certainly would be a great impropriety in treating on that subject with me, at a time when your engagement with Lady Sarah is yet in force. I request your lordship to believe that, however that business may end, you have my full forgiveness of the past, and that though we were never to meet again I shall still continue what I now consider myself to be—your lordship's legal wife,

MARIA.

Two months more elapsed; during which period the public papers had announced to the world the divorce of the earl of U—— and Lady Sarah. The damages given were only three thousand pounds.

About this time Maria received a letter from her mother, containing the painful intelligence that Mrs. Hunter had died at Bath. Mrs. Fisher had been absent from London six days to attend the last moments of her friend, whose loss she regretted very

sincerely: nor did the handsome legacies bequeathed to her family at all lessen the poignancy of their grief. Mrs. Hunter left to each of the Miss Fishers one thousand pounds; and to Mrs. Fisher the interest of two thousand during her life; the principal to be divided equally between her daughters on her decease. About the same time she had a letter from Mr. Roper confirming the news of the divorce, and informing her that the earl had conferred with him respecting their re-union; that he had advised their being remarried in London, to which Lord U—— was perfectly agreeable; and that on receiving her answer he meant to accompany his lordship on his excursion into Worcestershire, to have an interview with her; since he trusted that every obstacle was now removed. To this Miss Providence sent an early reply, signifying her acquiescence to his lordship's wishes.—A very few days intervened, when the meeting took place. It was exceedingly affecting for both parties. When the earl mentioned the propriety of

a second marriage, Maria said, "There is one circumstance, of which you, my lord, are at present ignorant, that may possibly change your opinion with regard to our union. But as I look on candour to be both right and necessary, and particularly so between married people, I shall acquaint your lordship with it, though such information should condemn me to seclusion. I could bare desertion—but I should detest myself were I capable of deceit." Maria then recounted the history of her clandestine birth; related every fact she knew respecting her mother; and assured lord U— she had rather sacrifice her own happiness than expose the frailty of her parents, and injure the other daughters, who were now ignorant of the fact." She requested him to weigh the matter well within himself, before he decided on their fate.—The earl, without the least hesitation, exclaimed, "My dear Maria! this fresh instance of your correct line of conduct endears you more than ever to my heart; this candid behaviour and

delicacy of sentiment afford the strongest proof you can give of the happiness I may expect in my intercourse with you. I will endeavour to merit it by being in future equally sincere. Believe me, dear Maria, that your mother's name shall be buried in my heart. When I divulge her secret, discard me for a villain, as I shall then deserve!—Your beauty and accomplishments will gain you the admiration and envy of the world; your virtues will win the hearts of the good,—and we will seek our happiness at home. My fortune is much lessened, Maria; still my title requires a large sum to support its dignity. Now, as I know you can feel content to live in a limited scale, suppose we were to quit England for ten years: that would enable us on our return to support our rank;—and possibly you could prevail on your mother to fix herself near the same spot. You could then form an acquaintance with her daughters, without betraying any connexion to the world. Be satisfied that my conduct shall not discover

even to your mother, that I know any thing of the fact:—her family would amply make up to you the deficiency of other society. As to myself, I have seen enough of mankind to be convinced, that happiness is not to be found in the haunts of dissipation. I declare to you, Maria, that in my gayest moments, when I have been rioting in what I then considered pleasure, I have thought with regret on the peaceful scenes which I had enjoyed with you in Scotland;—when no boisterous mirth exhilarated our spirits, no false incitements deluded the senses; but all was calm, innocent, and pure. Formerly, to enjoy with moderation had no charm for me; but now, that I have experienced the fallacy of visionary bliss, I will court more solid enjoyments: you shall henceforth be my guide, and together we will explore our road through the rugged path of life. Happy should I feel could I secure the thorns on my own side: but unfortunately I know that I have already sent one to your heart. Maria! it shall be my endeavour

to pluck it out, and my future study to heal the wound with the soothing balm of kindness. I entreat, leave not the trial to empty words; but let me prove my sorrow, my gratitude, my affection! You will find in me a faithful protector of your virtues, and you will have the merit of restoring a disobedient sinner to the hope of making his peace with Heaven."

Such language had the desired effect on her to whom it was addressed. Maria forgave her penitent husband, without expressing a doubt of his veracity. There was a kindness in her manner which declared he was not only forgiven, but beloved! Mr. Roper was now consulted respecting the time and place of their marriage. He stated his sentiment in favour of its being solemnized at the bishop of Worcester's. Had Mrs. Hunter been living, he would have thought it proper that the earl should have been married at her house; but as Maria had lost her kind patroness, it was judged right the marriage should take place in the

neighbourhood where Maria had latterly lived. They had been first married according to the Catholic form. This was the more satisfactory to Maria, who looked on this second performance of the ceremony as a debt due from her to the world, and which was to free her from any imputation, which the scandalous part of mankind is ever ready to affix to the slightest appearance of indecorum. It was agreed that the earl, accompanied by Mr. Roper, should go the next morning to the bishop's palace. His lordship received them graciously, and the 12th of August was fixed for the day of their re-union. It was now only the 15th of July; so that the gentlemen proceeded next day to London. The earl had much business to settle with his lawyers, which he got completed by dint of calling every day at their doors. Among other things, he had a deed prepared which insured to Maria an annuity of five hundred per annum on his decease.

Maria wrote a circumstantial account to her mother, of the conversation she had

held with the earl; mentioning his wish that she should fix her family near them. This letter obtained a speedy answer from Mrs. Fisher, saying she would most willingly resign her annuity to her late husband's heir, as Mrs. Hunter's bounty would prevent her feeling any inconvenience by so doing; that she would immediately make her arrangements for quitting London, resolving to fix within a short distance of the earl's residence; and concluded by stating that France would most probably be the place of destination, as the peace now offered an opportunity:—However it might be, she was disposed to establish herself near them.

The earl wrote Maria word how fully he was employed in preparing for his future happiness; and accompanied his letter with a present of some valuable family jewels. She was no less busy, the ladies will suppose, in arranging the bridal paraphernalia. However, her wardrobe occupied a very small portion of her thoughts: she certain-

ly gave it her attention so far as to have every thing neat and elegant, and suitable to the station she was to fill in society. Her dresses displayed more taste than fashion; nor did she suffer the latter in any instance to exceed the bounds of modesty. It were wished the generality of the sex would copy her in this regard:—indeed their doing so would not only redound to their credit, but to their advantage in every respect. For the truth of this we have only to observe the difference between the attention shown to that female,—who vainly seeks to attract by a display of her personal charms, decked out in all the absurdities of the extreme of fashion, heedless how nearly she therein imitates the frail fair one, the object of her contempt,—and the attention shown to her who, conforming to the rules of neatness and elegance, is conspicuous only by the modesty of her dress and demeanour. To the latter the dissipated fop will curb the trifling flippancy of his address; hoping, by the appearance of propriety, to

gain attention: and when he quits her, it is with sentiments of respect and sincere admiration:—whereas from the former he turns with ineffable contempt, with disgust it might be added, saying to himself, "She is well enough as the companion of an hour; but as a wife, it would be wiser for a man to blow out his brains than to marry her."

But to return to Maria.—Her chief attention was given to the preparation of her mind, and to the change she was about to undergo. She called all her imperfections in review, and reasoned with herself on the propriety of checking every evil propensity. The least faulty mind has some seeds of vice: these she resolved to watch over with the strictest care. Then reflecting upon the earl's disposition, she resolved never to wound his feelings by one word of reproach, or even make his past vices and follies the subject of conversation; but to show her reliance on his future conduct by burying in total silence every circumstance that had passed. The earl was naturally

hasty and prone to anger. She determined on those occasions not to irritate, but by mildness endeavour to conciliate his mind; and, should he ever act egregiously wrong, to wait the unimpassioned moment to reason on his error; saying to herself, "The life he has led will make him irritable, and dissatisfied with himself; it will be the office of an affectionate wife to mitigate the severity of his feelings—to gain his heart, not to condemn his actions." Every day she fortified her mind by prayer and various acts of religion, to prepare her for the forbearance which she knew to be necessary in the married state.

Thus did Maria employ herself, and thus the time passed rapidly away till the 12th of August; when Mr. Roper, in the earl's chariot, came to take our heroine to the bishop's palace; where the marriage ceremony was performed with great solemnity by the bishop, and with serious attention on the part of the earl and his lady, who renewed their vows with a mutual and solemn

intention of observing them. They immediately commenced their journey in the earl's travelling coach. Mr. Roper at the end of the first stage quitted them, and returned to town in the chariot. The coach contained, besides the earl and his lady, a female attendant; the earl's butler and valet followed on horseback: these formed his retinue, it being his determination to œconomize. It was the 1st of September when they reached Dover, having spent a few days occasionally on the road, as situation and weather invited;—to say the truth, they were almost fearful of getting into France before the French had somewhat settled themselves: but after crossing the water, they found they had been unnecessarily alarmed, as they met every where with civility and attention. The vintage exhibited a luxuriant appearance; and so general was the abundance, that it would have led them to suppose that the country had long enjoyed the blessings of peace. They proceeded without any obstacle to the charming banks of the Loire, where we

shall leave them in search of a house, as they meant to fix their residence in its vicinity.

The reader may suppose a lapse of ten years,—the fixed period for the earl and countess to return to England after their voluntary banishment. In fact, a peep into their mansion in Cavendish-square will discover the earl and his lady cheerfully conversing after their dinner with a few friends; one boy and two sweet little girls amusing themselves in arranging a small dissected map of Guernsey on a table; all of them pointing to Saint Pierre, it being their birth-place. The renewal of war having made the earl's stay very short in France, and not wishing to live in England before the appointed time, they had been to Guernsey, from whence they had very lately returned. Whilst in the town of Saint Pierre, Lady U—— had become the mother of Lord Charles, now seven years old; of Lady Maria, about five; and Lady Elizabeth, near three years of age. They may be truly called a happy family. The

earl had not lost his zest for society: but in his absence from England he had enjoyed happiness within a small circle of acquaintance, among whom was Mrs. Fisher and her two daughters, both at this time married, the eldest to a General Gower, the youngest to a Colonel Heartly. Both now resided in London. The countess still retained her love of solitude; and really looked forward with dread to the king's birth-day, when she was to undergo the ceremony of presentation. She was now about two-and-thirty; and though many amateurs of beauty may fix its zenith at seventeen, the countess was an instance that it may extend to her age. Her ladyship was allowed to be the handsomest woman in the drawing-room. Perhaps she was somewhat indebted to her disposition: since no rankling care disturbed her mind, no anxiety to outshine agitated her placid countenance;—she felt no wish but to conduct herself with that graceful dignity which became her rank, and with that easy deport-

ment and modest cheerfulness becoming a wife and mother of a family. Her gracious sovereign condescended to remark (in the ear of a friend) the propriety of lady U——'s manners, with a wish that they were oftener the standard of her court." The earl was an object of envy to his sex, since he could call such excellence his own: they were content to admire, for no bold adventurer dared express his admiration in her hearing, so effectually did her manner awe men into respect, at the same time that her affability gained the good opinion of all beholders. Yet was there an exception —one secret enemy was laying a scheme that she hoped would shake the fabric of that happiness the world proclaimed so loudly. This was Lady Matilda K——, the elder sister of Lady Sarah. This lady had been eighteen years a wife; and had experienced as much misery as a tyrannical temper joined to a bad disposition could bring upon her. For the first few years after her union with Lord K——, she had

showed an unceasing anxiety to become a mother; for, being strongly given to jealousy, she fancied that by having a family her lord would be less likely to neglect her: besides, she really wished for a submissive object upon whom she could exercise the capriciousness of her temper. But Providence in kindness did not grant Lady Matilda this desired resource: so after fretting herself to no purpose, and wearing out the temper of every one connected with her, she became so intolerable that her husband dreaded nothing so much as her company; and never spent one hour in his own house, unless accompanied with some friends as an auxiliary. This conduct on his part drew from her the most violent and ill-founded epithets; and she saw a rival in every pretty woman. Now it happened that the servant who had lived with Maria in Sloane-street was engaged in the service of Lady K——; and related, from no other motive than to divert her Lady's ill-humour, as much as she knew of Maria;

which amounted to no more than this;—that she was very good—and she did believe had been married to the earl of U——, though his servants declared she was only his mistress. To meet therefore with Maria as countess of U—— in the place of her sister, filled the mind of Lady Matilda with malice and revenge; and she exclaimed mentally as she passed Lady U——, "This is the first and it shall be the last time that our good queen shall be imposed upon by that fair face!" And instantly her features assumed a smile as she advanced to welcome the earl of U—— on seeing him again in his own country; and obligingly added, "We are particularly pleased that you have transplanted so brilliant an object to the British court." This compliment the earl received with a gracious bow, doubting indeed the lady's sincerity: but it was a trifle that could not long occupy his thoughts; it did not even recur to him to mention it to the countess till three days after, when a card of invitation to a

masquerade at Lady K——'s mansion in Berkley square, recalled the circumstance to his recollection. After naming it, "Well," said the earl, "I think we had better go, Maria. What says my love?"

"That I never was at a masquerade, except the one you may remember; and that I have not forgiven myself that foolish step. I feel I am quite unqualified for supporting a character; but if it be your wish, my lord, to go, you know I am always happy to attend you."

"I am sure of that, Maria. I would not urge you to any thing unpleasant; but as I had once an unfortunate connexion with the family, it appears to me my refusal might seem to proceed from private pique; on which account I think it would be as well, perhaps, for both of us to accept the invitation:—you know we can leave at any moment when you are inclined. And now I think of it, suppose, my dear, as it is expected we should take a friend, you were to

ask one of Mrs. Fisher's daughters to go with you ?"

Maria thanked the earl for the kind thought, and called the following morning to propose it to the eldest: but she having a pre-engagement, Mrs. Heartly promised to be of the party. Little trouble was requisite in preparing dresses, as the earl requested his lady would oblige him by putting on the religious habit she had worn on a similar occasion; whilst he would put on a handsome Spanish dress he had brought with him from Spain. Maria had however to make up a new habit, having given to her servant Jane the dress alluded to by the earl, from the idea that it would never be of further use.

Lady K——'s masquerade was the general theme of conversation. All the *bon ton* remained longer in town to wait this great fête; and many were the beaus and belles to whose expecting mind time lagged withal, till the eventful evening came. We

do not reckon the earl and countess of U—— among that number: with them Time told his usual round in one unvaried scene of rational employment. The earl was become so attached to his domestic circle, that he regretted when any circumstance called him from it, disgusted with the unmeaning conversation of the world; finding neither satisfaction nor amusement in talking over the faults of others, a short absence from home always gave him fresh zest for the comforts of his own fire-side.

The day previous to that of the masquerade the earl joined a party at his old friend the Welsh baronet's, who was then at his house in town. After coffee, when the gentleman went to cards, the earl retreated to Cavendish-square—saying, as he entered the drawing-room, "I believe, Maria, there is some danger that I shall tire you with my company; I find myself growing selfish —I am never so happy as when with you; all other society appears to me trifling and insipid. And are these, Maria, (pointing to

his three children,) the only companions of your solitude?"

"All, my lord: and they are all I wish in your absence."

"In truth, Maria, you are an extraordinary creature; you are really different from all your sex—tell me, my love, how is it? is there any physical cause? were I a better craniologist I might possibly find it in the shape of your head: or perhaps, the filaments about the heart in you are of a more delicate texture."

"Rather," replied the countess smiling, "seek the reason in your own partial opinion, which reflects all my actions in the most favourable light. As to any merit I may intrinsically possess—if I have indeed an atom more than my neighbours—I am indebted to the good nuns; from them I derived a taste for the useful studies of the mind. Speaking of the nuns reminds me of what lately has occupied my thoughts—the education of our girls. Where, my lord, do you purpose placing them?"

"It is you, my love, must think for the girls—I, for my boy. I am on the look-out for a tutor for him, as I purpose keeping him at home till he shall be about fourteen, and then sending him to Cambridge or Oxford, as I consider a public school to afford a more ample field for emulation, and to give to young men after a certain age many and great advantages. As I hope our Charles will one day fill a seat in our British senate, I will give him every opportunity of expanding his mind and improving his understanding. With respect to the girls, I will not pretend to dictate to you: but I will venture my opinion, that they can be no where so well as under your own roof, with a governess of your own choosing."

"Thank you, my lord. I acknowledge there is only one place where I should think them better—I need scarcely mention that I mean my own convent. To place them there is at present impracticable; I shall therefore adopt your lordship's opinion.

But should a peace, for which we all hope, be established in the course of a few years, I will then consult with you on its propriety, and be guided by your superior judgement."

"I can answer that it will not differ from yours," replied the earl. "But," continued he, "we are all this while regardless of time —it is later than usual; to-morrow the world will steal some of our delightful hours. Were all in the married state as happy in each other's society as you and I are, those would not find in the world that countenance they now do whose frivolous minds are solely bent on devising new modes of killing time —But why do I preach? when but for you I should have been like the generality of men. It is you who have taught me the value of time. Oh, Maria! so changed are my ideas —so much do they depend on your bright example—that were I to lose you, I fear that my mind would become annihilated, and myself a moving cipher."

Tears of pleasure glistened in our he-

roine's eyes as she silently ejaculated a prayer of thanks, that Heaven had given her so kind a husband.

At ten o'clock on the night of the 29th of June 18—, more than two thousand people crowded to Berkeley-square, where an illuminated garden became the scene of Lady Matilda K——'s masquerade. It would be vain to endeavour to describe all the various charms of this enchanting place. Pagodas in the Chinese style, illuminated with coloured lamps, were seen in perspective from the entrance;—groves of rose- and orange-trees perfumed the air, and in the centre rose a building with this inscription, "*To Oberon.*" It was very large, and divided into several compartments, forming indeed a fairy palace: the entrance was the hall of audience, where a group of fairies and elves were waiting Oberon's commands, who sent some to fill the sparkling goblet from a refreshing fountain; others to superintend the ices and different refreshments, —while Britannia presented a cornucopia to

Oberon, who kept it constantly replenished with a liquor as fine and delicious as the clearest nectar. Here wandered the resemblance of every human character Proteus' self could assume. Beauty, wit, and fashion united their attractions to fascinate the senses. Even Lady U—— felt renovated with the busy scene. She was particularly distinguished; there being many nuns, but herself the only likeness of one. But she took care to remain near the earl, as did her friend, till a party of mountebanks pushing through the crowd to reach a stage where they meant to perform divided the trio. At the same moment a lady, habited as a Jewess, was nearly thrown down by the pressure; when our heroine caught her arm, and really alarmed, asked her "if she should assist her in trying to leave the crowd." The Jewess requested her to accompany her to an adjoining apartment, where, under pretence of illness, she retained our heroine more than twenty minutes. Meanwhile Lord U—— was looking for his lady, determined when

he could meet her to persuade her to return, it being now two o'clock.—A Spaniard, apparently in haste, whispered him, "Do you know an Augustine nun?" To which my lord rejoined, "Where is she?" The mask demanded, "Are you her brother?" "No," replied my lord; "but her husband." "Then you are the last man she wishes to see." And he hastened away.

The earl, surprised at what he heard, still proceeded in search of the countess; when the Spaniard again met him, of whom the earl demanded, "Have you any reason for the words you spoke just now, or were they accidental?" To which the other replied, "It is plain you are no Spaniard, or your stiletto would have worked ere this."

"By Heaven!" retorted the earl, "this is no trifle—what is it you mean?"

"Shall I show you the lady?" asked the Spaniard, pointing to a grove.

"I'll follow you," was the earl's answer.

How great was his astonishment, when having proceeded some paces along the grove,

he descried the well-known figure of Maria in close conversation with a person dressed as an abbé! The earl's agitation was such that he was obliged to support himself upon the arm of his companion.

"She bears indeed the sure resemblance of my wife," he said: "both the dress and figure are hers!—let us approach them."

They walked forward, whilst the objects of their remarks seemed too much pleased with each other to attend to any thing else. They were sufficiently near to perceive the lady give a picture, which the gentleman received upon his knees; and he was devouring the lady's hand with kisses, when the earl exclaimed, "This is indeed too much!" The lovers, surprised to find themselves observed, hastened towards the temple, followed by the earl and his new acquaintance. They reached the building just as the lovers had entered it, who disappeared by means of the variety of passages, which were so contrived, one leading from another, that they seemed in this instance

as if made for the purpose of misleading those who had curiosity enough to explore the intricate recesses of the temple.

After trying in vain to gain a sight of the fugitives, " I wish," said the earl, " I had never entered this cursed place. Appearance says that that lady was my wife—reason maintains it is impossible—which am I to believe?"

" Both," rejoined the mask.

" How, both ?" inquired the earl.

" It is natural for a man to believe what he himself has seen—So much for appearance. And reason must have convinced you, my lord, that a wife may be false ;—recollect Lady Sarah."

" Good night," said the earl ; " I do not thank you for the office you have taken." And he hastened from the temple unconscious where he was going, till he entered the inner saloon, where he was hurrying forward, when Maria, delighted to see him, caught hold of his arm, saying, " My dear lord, are you ready to go home ? I have been seeking you in all directions."

The earl, nearly overpowered with the various feelings which at once assailed his mind, pushed her from him as he would have done a basilisk, saying, "Deceitful woman!" then the next moment laid hold of her elbow and hurried her forward to the lobby, where he ordered a servant to call up his carriage. Being told it was at the door, he handed her friend into it. Then turning to his lady—"Madam," said he, "go home; and be prepared to speak the truth when I shall arrive."

Lady U—— more dead than alive got into the carriage, unable to articulate a word: and so astonished was her friend at all she had seen and heard, that she was as little disposed to break silence. When the coach stopped in Cavendish-square, Mrs. Heartly begged it might take her home; but Lady U—— requested her friend would not leave her for that night, and the two ladies proceeded to the drawing-room.

Lady U—— greatly agitated, as she pulled off her mask, exclaimed, "Not even my hus-

band shall ever prevail on me to assume any disguise again.—Do, my dear madam, try to recollect what I have said or done this evening that can possibly have given my lord offence: you were with me the whole of the night, except indeed during the time I spent with that sick lady—Did you see my lord in my absence? Surely my going with that lady could not offend him:—and yet a sad foreboding tells me I have lost his affections—perhaps for ever!" Here a flood of tears came timely to her relief.

"Do not afflict yourself, Lady U——," said Mrs. Heartly: "the earl must at this moment labour under some great error respecting you, which I make no doubt will explain itself away: I am sure that you have neither done nor said any thing which merits censure:—moreover, I am confident he will be angry with himself for the manner in which he has treated you. I expect every minute to see him enter a penitent."

"God grant he may recover his former opinion of me!" rejoined the countess.

"He will," replied her friend. "Let us try to cheer our spirits with a review of the gaieties we have just left. To me they were novel; and to say the truth, when I first entered, the sudden effect of the brilliant lights—the confused noise—and the strange appearance of so many false faces, nearly deprived me of my senses: I never was so terrified; but I soon recovered to the perception of all the delightful things around, and continued in a sort of happy delirium until your little *fracas* convinced me we were neither more nor less than human beings. People may talk of the power of description, of the pleasures of imagination; but nothing short of the reality could have given me an idea of the enchanting scene we have quitted."

A loud knocking at the door announced the arrival of the earl. The pale countenance of Lady U—— and the heaving of her bosom were indications of her agitated frame; whilst the alternate red and white of Mrs. Heartly showed that she also was

ill at ease. The earl entered the room, holding his mask in his hand, his face inflated with anger. No sooner had the servant shut the door, than throwing the mask upon the floor he stamped upon it, saying, "Thus would I like to treat all deceivers!" Then approaching Maria, he said, "Madam, I am come to know the truth; and I insist that here in the presence of Mrs. Heartly you inform me who was the wretch on whom you were pleased to lavish so much fondness in the grove?"

"Me, my lord! I pledge you my word that I was not in the grove except when you were with me. Indeed, my lord, I did not speak to any gentleman but in your presence.—When I was separated from you, I accompanied into an adjoining apartment, a lady who was ill, and remained with he till a few minutes before I met you again.''

"Who was the lady?"

"I do not know her name; she was dressed as a Jewess, but did not take off her mask."

"A likely thing," said the earl, "that a

sick lady should not remove her mask! Your tale, madam, is like yourself—false! This instant tell me the name of your treacherous lover; it is the only means of pardon."

Here Lady U—— arose from her seat, and kneeling on the floor said: "My lord, I solemnly declare that I am innocent of what you accuse me. I swear to you that you are the only man I ever loved: my heart never offended you by even suggesting a preference to another!"

"Rise, madam," said the earl, "lest I spurn with my foot a being I have so long, so erroneously cherished! This night you may remain; but do not contaminate my children by looking on them:—to-morrow we will part."

During this speech Maria had fallen on the floor. Mrs. Heartly feared she was in a fit; and requesting the earl to retire, rang the bell; then summoned her woman. Upon raising her up they found her insensible. She was taken to bed, and remained in the same state for some hours after the

physician, who had been instantly sent for, had arrived. He pronounced her to be in a dangerous state: that the countess's nerves had undergone a severe shock; that there would be great doubt of her recovery; and particularly insisted upon the necessity of her mind not being disturbed, saying, "Nothing but rest of the mental faculties can restore her senses."

Mrs. Heartly ventured to pay a visit to the earl. He admitted her: and she, after stating the doctor's opinion to him of the countess, began with all the warmth of affection to reason with him, saying, "Is it not possible, my lord, that amongst the vast crowd of masks there might have been one, though unseen by any of our own party, who wore the same dress as Lady U——? Pray do not condemn her upon an uncertainty."

"I honour your motive, Mrs. Heartly, in wishing me to think that such might have been the case. It was the hope of finding it so that made me return to that horrid sink of deceit:—I left no question unasked; I

even examined the porter's book myself, and found to my sorrow only one admitted in the garb of an Augustine nun. I am indebted to your kindness in having paid all this attention to *her* who I fear is unworthy of your friendship: do not stay to tarnish your own bright reputation; but recommend to her servants to obey the physician's direction in every thing. She cannot now be removed..... Pity a distracted man! I have no friends to advise with on this delicate occasion; for, since my marriage with Maria, she has been my only friend—We have been every thing to each other! But now the confidence which years of happiness had cemented is broken;—she is an outcast; I a wretched wanderer. One only tie attaches me to life—my children. I will take them with me this day to my country seat. Will you please to tell *her*, whom you once called friend, that I wish her to take care of her health, and that I do not desire her to quit this house; but that she may write me her wishes respecting her future residence:—

that I feel inclined to grant all that is compatible with honour. I have sought her admirer in vain; I do not believe he re-entered the saloon after a certain interview—"

"My lord," interrupted Mrs. Heartly, "I beg your pardon; but I wish you to consider how your absenting yourself, now that your lady is in this dangerous state, will open the way to a thousand false reports."

"Can you suppose, madam," exclaimed the earl, "that I am to nurse a false, perfidious wife, to be a mark for the world to point its finger at?"

"By no means, my lord; but allow me to say, that I am sure, should Lady U—— recover her reason sufficiently to learn that you, my lord, and the children have quitted the house, the information would be her death—I am confident she would not survive it a day."

"What then am I to do?" said the earl. "I am the most unfortunate of men: Honour bids me quit—humanity bids me stay."

"The path of honour, my lord, is often deceitful; but the dictates of humanity are always just. I beseech you, my lord, stay till Lady U—— can vindicate her cause;—give her a hearing, my lord: when she has spoken, I will never presume to offer an opinion to your lordship, or to name the subject afterwards."

"Well, good lady, I will comply with your request: and as I doubt not but you will sometimes look in upon the invalid, I shall hope that you will acquaint me as soon as she is well enough for the interview."

Mrs. Heartly had now obtained her wish, in getting the earl's word that he would not for the present leave Cavendish-square. On returning to the countess's chamber she was glad to find Lady U—— had fallen asleep; and the physician, whom she met on the stairs, informed her that this was a favourable omen; and he thought it likely she would continue some hours in that state, as nature seemed very much exhausted. He desired that the invalid might be kept perfectly quiet, saying

that "he would look in again before seven o'clock."

Mrs. Heartly took this opportunity to return home. On her way she called upon her mother, anxious that Mrs. Fisher should know the reason of her stay; as she had strictly adhered to her mother's rule of conduct, and thought it highly proper to inform her where she had passed the night, never having spent one out of her own house, except in attendance upon her mother, whose health since her return from Guernsey had been very indifferent.

It was two o'clock when Mrs. Heartly reached Conduit-street, where Mrs. Fisher now lived; who, she grieved to hear, had been so ill as to have required her company early in the morning; and was surprised to learn that her daughter had not returned after the masquerade. She hastened to the bedside; and by way of diverting her mother's attention Mrs. Heartly gave an account of what had passed in Cavendish-square. This intelligence was far from having the desired

effect. Could she possibly have guessed how seriously Mrs. Fisher would be hurt by the relation, she would have chosen any other subject of conversation. Mrs. Fisher summoned sufficient spirits to appear better than she really was, that she might not alarm her daughter, but induce her to go immediately to her own house, that her servants should not put any wrong constructions on her absence. She then requested her to dine in Conduit-street, and after dinner wished her to return and see the invalid in Cavendish-square. This proposal terminated Mrs. Heartly's visit for the present. No sooner had she left Mrs. Fisher, than the latter exerted herself to sit up in her bed to write the following letter to the Countess of U——, which she commissioned Mrs. Heartly to give her as soon as she should be well enough to peruse it.

LETTER XXIII.

FROM MRS. FISHER TO THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF U——.

Conduit-street.

I FEEL anxiously concerned to learn by my daughter Heartly that a new misfortune has befallen my beloved Maria. This is to beg you will not suffer your mind to be depressed by any false accusations. Now is the time to exert your reasoning faculties, that by your cool unbiassed conduct you may maintain that innocence and virtue for which you have on all former occasions been conspicuous. Consider how truly miserable you would have felt, had you really deserved the censure now thrown upon you. When the present cloud shall be dissipated, you will derive advantage from the temporary darkness with which it now surrounds you, and which will surely cause your virtue to shine with additional brightness. I am sorry my illness renders me unfit to be removed in any way, else I

would ere this have been with you to cheer your drooping spirits: Do not sink under ideal misery;—this cannot be called real, since it originated on false grounds. Address yourself to Him who can dispel the mist from all eyes, and have a proper confidence in Divine Justice that your innocence will become manifest;—be resolved to leave the time to Him who conducts all things for the best.—Be assured of my prayers and affection.

MARIA FISHER.

The writing this letter, and the thoughts which accompanied it, had so operated on Mrs. Fisher's frame, that she could not conceal from Mrs. Heartly upon her return that she was considerably worse. Indeed that lady was inclined not to quit her mother; but the latter insisted on her visiting her friend.

On entering the mansion in Cavendish-square the account of Lady U—— was encouraging: she had not awaked during the

day, nor did she until after a sleep of twelve hours. Mrs. Heartly was sitting by the bed-side when the countess awoke—so recovered, so refreshed, that for the first few minutes she did not recollect having been ill. A short period brought the truth to her mind: then looking at Mrs. Heartly, she anxiously inquired for the earl. Her friend gave her the letter from Mrs. Fisher, hoping that would fortify her mind; and then told her that the earl wished to converse with her on the subject of the preceding evening.

Lady U——, composed by her long sleep and roused to exertion by her mother's letter, determined to request an immediate interview, in which she hoped to convince the earl of her entire innocence. He was then in his study, reading an impertinent paragraph in that morning's paper, which described in pompous language the magnificence of Lady Matilda K——'s masquerade: and after naming most of the persons who compose the fashionable world

as being present, (among the rest the earl and countess of U——,) ended with this remark, " that masquerade scenes were un-
" fortunate to a certain peer, who had lost
" one wife at a masquerade, and it was cre-
" dibly reported was in no small danger
" of losing another on a similar occasion."
The earl's countenance had not recovered its composure when Mrs. Heartly requested admittance. On hearing that the countess thought herself sufficiently well to request an interview, he declared his willingness to meet her. And Mrs. Heartly, judging very properly that they could better explain their sentiments without witnesses, retired to the nursery; where the children showed great pleasure at seeing her, and tormented her with questions concerning their " dear mamma." They were delighted on being told she was well enough to go to the drawing-room, and begged they might be permitted to see her. This was an embarrassing question, which Mrs. Heartly answered by saying, " I hope your

mamma will soon be well enough to receive you. At this moment a foot was heard upon the stairs; it was the countess, in search of her friend and children. On entering the nursery she burst into tears; but by her cheerful look it was evident they were tears of pleasure. As she conducted Mrs. Heartly to the drawing-room, she informed her that the earl had listened patiently to the account she had given of herself; that he seemed perfectly convinced that his suspicion was to be attributed to the machination of some secret enemy, who took that opportunity of inflaming his mind; that he felt satisfied that the person he had been taken to see was not his wife; and that since the porter had not admitted a character similar to hers, he supposed that some inhabitant of Lady Matilda's mansion had personated the Augustine nun, —for what reason he could not guess, though it was plain the motive must have proceeded from a base and malicious disposition.

On the entrance of the earl, Mrs. Heart-

ly spoke of her mother's illness as a cause for her immediate departure; saying, "She altered so much for the worse yesterday in the course of a few hours, that I really fear she is dangerously ill."

"Do, my dear," said the earl to his lady, "order the coach, and go with your friend to see how Mrs. Fisher does. The air will do *you* good: and to say the truth, I am anxious you should appear out as soon as possible, to convince the ill-natured part of the world that their scandalous insinuations exist only in their own wicked hearts."

Lady U—— felt grateful to her lord for this liberal proof of confidence. In the course of half an hour the two ladies were in Conduit-street. From Mrs. Fisher's servant they learned that her mistress had been so alarmingly ill as to have sent for her eldest daughter; and that a messenger had set out a few minutes before to Cavendish-square, with a summons for Mrs. Heartly. On hearing this intelligence, they

thought it best to dispatch the footman to acquaint the earl that Mrs. Fisher was so ill that the ladies were uncertain how long they might be detained.

Mrs. Fisher, as soon as she knew they were in the house, desired they would come to her. But no sooner had they approached Mrs. Fisher's bed, than they were shocked at her death-like appearance. Her features seemed to have undergone a total change: she knew them; and desiring to be raised up in bed, she addressed her three daughters, though circumstances forbade her naming more than two. She thanked them in the most affectionate manner, for the great attention they had ever paid to her wishes; recommended to them in the strongest terms to adhere to the practice of their religious duties during life, which would be the only and infallible means of crowning their last moments with happiness: "Whereas, should you be so unfortunate," continued Mrs. Fisher, "as to act in contradiction to the divine pre-

cepts, you will find, my children, that you will thereby imbitter your gayest hours; even though the action should remain unknown to the world, you could never become reconciled to yourselves: repentance may, through the merits of Christ, obtain forgiveness, but cannot silence the sting of conscience—the least supportable of all evils, because it is just."

Here Mrs. Fisher seemed quite exhausted. Her children, unable to restrain the violence of their feelings, were hurrying out of the room, to avoid distressing their mother, when Mrs. Fisher requested Lady U—— to give her a few minutes more of her company. The latter, whose mind was more discomposed from the peculiarity of her real situation and from her late sufferings, resolved, however, to suppress her grief, whilst she listened to the last injunction, as she firmly believed, of her mother. "My beloved child," said Mrs. Fisher, on finding they were alone, "you have been the unceasing object of my solicitude: most

sincerely do I regret the leaving you thus obliged to disavow your parent. Mrs. Heartly yesterday informed me of the earl's suspicions, which were no less ungenerous than unfounded. I sought this interview, that I might beg your forgiveness for the unmerited hardships you have experienced on my account. It is needless for me to remind you of those duties you have ever practised. Happy had it been for me, had my days passed as innocently as yours! Maria, you cannot help feeling sensible to the blessings of a clear conscience, and, I hope, will continue to enjoy its sunshine as long as you have life. Perhaps I have been blameable in having so anxiously concealed the mystery of your birth:—it was for your sake, and that of your sisters, I did so. God is my witness, that happiness deserted my bosom from the day that I consented to desert you; from that moment I have never ceased to reproach myself, and to ask forgiveness of my Maker—Do you, Maria, be my advo-

cate at the throne of Mercy. Adieu, my much-loved, much injured child!" And she sunk exhausted on her pillow; whilst the countess bathed the feverish cheek of her mother with tears, and tried, as well as her sobs would allow, to convince her parent of her reverence and her love. She implored Mrs. Fisher in the most earnest manner not to suffer any thoughts of her to disturb her quiet: adding, "Do, my much-respected mother, banish this subject from your mind; it retards your recovery: believe me, nothing can ever give me so much pleasure as to see you restored to health."

Mrs. Fisher cast a look upon her daughter, that convinced her her wish was vain. The name of Maria quivered on her lips—her voice refused its office—convulsions seized her frame. Lady U——, terrified, ran to the door for assistance; and ere she returned the vital spark was extinguished. Mrs. Fisher's countenance had assumed the sallow hue of death; and Maria, as she

leaned over her to give her last embrace, felt resigned to the shock, in the hope that her last moment had been happy.... Feeling the great necessity for fortitude on this trying occasion, where the affection of the daughter must be confined to the appearance of friendly sorrow, Lady U—— considered the words in which she should communicate this sad intelligence in the parlour, where her friends anxiously expected her, though without any immediate apprehension of the loss they had sustained. Hard indeed was her lot, who felt all the sorrow without the consolation of a daughter. Yet no person could better acquit herself than Lady U——. The practice of every virtue had fortified her mind for trials, and enabled her to conquer them.

About nine o'clock the countess returned home. When alone in her carriage, she experienced no small degree of comfort in thinking she was about to meet an affectionate husband, who by sharing would lessen the anguish which now oppressed her

heart. How shocking then must have been her disappointment, when, on entering her drawing-room, it was empty; and, on inquiring for the earl, she was told that "he was with his children in his study!" A circumstance so unusual at this hour struck the countess with astonishment, succeeded by a dread that something alarming had occurred. She sent to acquaint her lord of her return; and by the messenger received the following.

LETTER XXIV.

FROM THE EARL TO THE COUNTESS OF U——.

Madam,

I AM sincerely hurt that your conduct prevents my acting the part of a friend on the present melancholy occasion, as I had wished to have done. The inclosed will explain the cause that I am painfully obliged to decline seeing you. Such flagrant hypocrisy, by many, would be thought deserving of public exposure; but as I can derive no consolation from such a proceeding, I wish not to aggravate the misfortune. I have laid down for myself a plan which I mean invariably to pursue.—I will suppose you have read the inclosed: and now, madam, we must bid each other a lasting farewell! Perhaps you may think me severe in proposing a separation, when no criminal act has been proved. It will be right that you should know, that in my estimation of things, the wife who has prostituted her af-

fection to another, is equally guilty with her who has been detected in the fact—the sin lying in the intention more than in the deed.

I request you will inform me where you wish to reside; as it is my wish, notwithstanding, to conform to your happiness as far as is consistent with honour. You must, however, debar yourself the society of your children, till time shall have proved the propriety of your conduct. Rest satisfied in this—that, as you once expressed a desire that they should be educated in Paris, I will send them thither as soon as there shall be a peace. The sum of five hundred per annum, settled upon you in case of my decease, shall be regularly paid by my steward: the chariot and horses, also, you are at liberty to take for your own use. And now, madam, I beg to assure you of my good wishes. In proportion as I once thought myself happy in your love, I feel now depressed that I cannot subscribe myself by a dearer tie than that of being your well wisher,

C—— U——.

THE INCLOSURE.

To the Honourable the Earl of U—— (with a miniature).

I am exceedingly sorry, my lord, that my meeting with the only woman I ever loved should have occasioned her uneasiness. I have been told your lordship was witness to my receiving her picture at Lady Matilda's masquerade. It is true that I am in possession of that treasure, which I value more than my worldly wealth. But rumour reports, that in consequence of that gift you are about to separate from Lady U——. As a proof that I am worthy of your esteem, I resign the valued portrait, and assure your lordship that I will never more step between you and happiness. To-morrow I shall quit this kingdom, to seek an honourable death. Before I go, my lord, take my assurance that Lady U—— is no further guilty, than in bestowing that which it is not in our power to command—the heart. I had frequent opportunities of seeing Miss Providence during the period you were on your tour in Italy.—Who could behold such

beauty, and be insensible to love! On my return to Paris in search of her, who had promised to be mine, I learned at the convent that she was in England. I sought her in vain, till at Lady Matilda's, on passing a sick lady, the figure of her friend struck me. I followed; when lifting her mask to look at the invalid, I perceived it to be my long-lost Maria. A few seconds restored me to her recollection—Wonder not then that I seized that propitious moment to speak of our former love. I possibly am indebted to surprise for the kind gift which I here resign as a sacrifice to her happiness. I pledge my word she is innocent of crime. I remain, my lord,

A DISAPPOINTED MAN.

It is impossible to describe Lady U——'s emotions on reading the above letter. She saw in a moment that this was a wilful fabrication to delude the earl into a belief that she had acted with hypocrisy—Who could thus become her enemy, and why? she was equally puzzled to guess: and she

sat a long while lost in conjecture, unconscious of her thoughts and unable to come to a conclusion. After some time she recollected the earl required an answer: "Was ever woman so unfortunate as I?" exclaimed Maria mentally; "and at this moment, when I am overwhelmed with accumulated distress, I have no friend to consult. Mrs. Hunter is no more! and this day my unfortunate mother has paid the debt of nature—fallen, I doubt, a sacrifice to her apprehensions for me! O God!" she continued, "Thou art my only solace; Thou canst change the hearts of thy creatures as thou seest fit: I humbly call upon thee in this time of misery;—let thy goodness permit the discovery of the abettors of this base calumny;—or, if it be thy pleasure that I should fall a victim to slander, give me the grace of submission to thy will." Then rising from her knees, in which position she had poured forth her prayer, she seated herself to answer the earl, which she did in the following words.

LETTER XXV.

FROM THE COUNTESS TO THE EARL OF U——.

My lord,

So various and distressing have been the circumstances which I have lately experienced, and so rapid in succession, that I scarcely know my own thoughts respecting them. Of this I am convinced, that the letter your lordship has inclosed for my perusal is certainly the work of an enemy to both of us. I wish that your lordship had examined its contents more carefully before you had condemned me; because I never had any picture taken of myself, nor do I know how the one in question was obtained—not with my knowledge, I solemnly declare. However, your lordship is pleased to say "We must separate." I hope, if such a step must take place, that it will be for a very short period, as I trust in Provi-

dence that something will happen shortly to convince you that what I now aver is the fact. With regard to my place of residence, the world seems to me a void, in which there is little choice. Happiness I do not expect any where—absent from you and my children; but I think I should feel more contented with the ladies in Worcestershire in whose house I remained before. There I will pray unceasingly that your lordship may fully prove the falsehood of this accusation, conscious that my present disgrace is undeserved. I hope to be indulged with an interview with my children. With prayers for your lordship's happiness, I remain (proud that my conduct has in no way forfeited the title) your lordship's affectionate wife,

MARIA U——.

It was three in the morning when Lord U—— received the above. To sleep was impossible; so he spent the remainder of the time till morning in pacing his cham-

ber in a bewildered and distracted state of mind. He saw by his lady's style of writing that she thought herself unjustly treated. Sometimes he was inclined to think so himself;—then a look at the picture justified his present conduct. The miniature he thought a strong resemblance to Maria: How could this have happened, unless she had herself sat for it?—The earl had so lost himself in a maze of useless conjecture that he was undecided how to act. Another look at the portrait drove his mind to desperation; and it being now nine o'clock he resolved upon his lady's immediate departure. So ringing his bell, which was answered by his valet, he desired to see the steward; to whom he imparted the news, that Lady U——wished to make a journey into Worcestershire; and desired him to attend the countess, and to see that the chariot was at the door by eleven o'clock. "And should your lady express a wish to see the children, send them to her," said the earl.

And now the most arduous part seemed

over:—he had ordered her departure. He was retiring to his chamber, that he might be out of the way of meeting Maria, when his valet, suspecting from his master's wild looks that something unusual had disturbed him, was half-afraid to venture before him. However, he knocked at the door, to say that a person, a female, wished permission to speak with his lordship. "I am [illegible] now," replied the earl, "tell her to come some other time."

When the servant delivered his message, the person declared she would not leave the house without seeing his lordship: and finding the valet determined not to return to his master, she went to the steward, and with tears assured him she had something to tell the earl which nearly concerned his lady.—The steward, knowing how soon she was to depart, and thinking that all was not right, resolved at all events to risk his lord's displeasure, and tell him what the woman said. Apologizing for the liberty of appearing before him, he said, "I

beg your lordship's pardon for disturbing you, but the woman below persists in having something very particular to communicate, which relates to my lady; and no one can persuade her to go away without seeing your lordship."

"Then show her to my study," replied the earl; and he hastened thither. When the steward ushered in the female, the earl instantly recollected her features, although he could not at first recall where he had seen her.

"It is very inconvenient," said the earl, addressing her, "for me to attend to any one at this moment; therefore I beg you to be quick in mentioning your business."

"O, my lord! replied the woman, "I am come to acknowledge a crime which I would not have committed for all the world, had I known it would have injured my dear mistress;—for I suppose, my lord, you recollect Jenny Atkins, who used to see your lordship when you visited in Sloane-street."

"Indeed I do; and I hope you have been well, and are in a good situation."

"As to place, my lord, I have left mine this morning. When I heard as your lordship was about to part from my lady, and to send her as they say into banishment, owing to my having been persuaded into a joke, I told Lady Matilda that I would not stop another day in her house if it was full of gold: and I made bold to come to tell all to your lordship."

"Well, my good girl, I beg you will be brief in telling me; for I cannot guess what you mean.—Besides, as I said before, I am much engaged."

"I will, my lord. Your lordship knows that Lady Matilda K—— gave a masquerade. She used often to talk to me about the places I had lived in, and the ladies I had attended: and so her ladyship was talking quite familiarly about the masquerade; and she asked me whether I had ever seen one? I said, 'No, my Lady; but I have a dress that a lady wore at one;' and

I told her it had belonged to the countess of U——. As she wished to see it, I showed it to her; and she says to me, 'This is the prettiest dress I have seen.' On the morning of that Friday, my lady says again to me, 'Jenny, I am almost sure there will be a habit like yours at my house to-night; and it would occasion good diversion if you put on yours and the mask. I'll give Nicholas the footman [illegible], and he and you shall have a little love scene in the grove; you shall both hold yourselves in readiness at the back of the temple, and I will direct you what to do—it will only be a good joke, and no harm can possibly happen from an innocent frolic.' We did as my lady said: and between one and two o'clock she let us through the back of that temple she had built for the fairies; and she gave me a picture that she bid me give to Nicholas; and told him what to do. The next morning my lady gave to each of us a guinea, because she said we had afforded her a deal of amusement: but I was

told yesterday by my lady's own footman that you, my lord, had taken me for the countess, because as I had on that dress; and that you thought Nicholas her lover; and that your lordship was so desperate angry, you was determined never to forgive her. Now do pray, my lord," continued Jenny, (as she was in the act of kneeling down,) "pray forgive lady U——; my ghost would never rest if I was to injure that good lady. Indeed, my lord, our Nicholas is ready to swear his Bible oath to every word I have told your lordship."

"Rise, my good girl," said the earl: "I feel obliged to you for letting me know this circumstance;—you shall not be the worse for your honest confession."

"Please you, my lord, I look for no reward nor thanks; only to ease myself of having committed such a bad action. But indeed I never thought to hurt the child unborn, much less my former mistress who was always good to me."

"I believe you are innocent, Jenny:—And

pray, where is the picture you gave to Nicholas?"

"It was not my picture, my lord; only one Lady Matilda lent to me;—I gave it back to her the next morning."

"Well, good Jenny; and was it Nicholas your mistress got to write to me a day or two ago?"

"No; but Nicholas knows who did write a letter: though it would not be fair in me to tell, because Nicholas heard my lady and the chaplain scheming it by themselves, and he could not help hearing: indeed that was the first thing made us think we had done wrong. Nicholas heard my lady say to the chaplain, 'Inclose the likeness I got Miani to take from the public print—it has little resemblance to her; but jealousy will pourtray every feature to her silly husband.' When Nicholas told me this, I says, 'Nicholas, there's foul play, I am sure.' Then I went to visit Mrs. Heartly's woman;—she had often asked me to take tea with her; and I knew she would know all from

her mistress. So I pumped it out of her, my lord, about all as you was going to do; and then I came here as soon as I got up to tell your lordship."

"Thank you, my girl. Here are five guineas for your good intention. Be assured, however, that Lady U—— and I are not going to part; you must not believe any person who says so:—and should anything occur, Jenny, in which I can serve you, do not be backward in letting me know it."

Jenny with many profound curtsies thanked his lordship for his generosity; and retired with sensations as pleasing, though not so refined, as those which agitated the bosom of the earl. He remained in his study a few minutes to regain composure, and to bring his wandering thoughts into something like order. A sudden impulse made him open his scrutoire where lay the fatal picture. He took it up, and was astonished that so poor an attempt could have disturbed him for a moment; the portrait represented no one trait exactly. In repla-

cing it he perceived the chariot approaching the house. His heart seemed almost bursting: he rang his bell, and ordered the valet to inform Lady U—— he wished to see her in the drawing-room. Lady U—— was in her chamber. Not daring to trust herself with taking leave of her children, she had remained there the whole of the morning, and had just closed her parting letter to Lord U——, in which was this affecting paragraph: "I cannot see my children; "their natural affection would urge them "to cling to their mother. I could not "possibly say, 'My children, I am thought "unworthy to be your associate, you must "not accompany me, perhaps will never see "me more!—you are to be intrusted to "strangers, rather than to me!' Were I to "say this, my children would suppose that I "had been guilty of a heinous crime. On "the other hand, Were I to inform them I "was accused innocently by their father, and "condemned as guilty without even know-"ing my enemy; their innocent hearts, young

"and pure as they are, would lean to jus-
"tice—they would abhor their father. I
"will not be the occasion of such a thought;
"their minds shall remain unbiassed by
"me; I leave it to the all-discriminating
"hand of Providence to point out the truth
"at his own time; confident, my lord, that
"you will not long remain ignorant of my
"innocence." Her letter finished, Lady U— found her mind strengthened, and in a great measure resigned. Her footman had already received her trunks from her woman; she only waited the last summons, when a tap at the door caused her to open it, and she heard the earl's message. Pleased that at least he wished to see her once more, she proceeded to comply with his request. In her hand she carried the letter. No tear was on her cheek, though the redness of her eyes evinced that many had been shed. No trace of anger appeared on her countenance; no bold assurance marked the determined mind: her upright conduct was sup-

ported by a modest confidence—hers was the firm step of injured innocence. She entered the room where stood her lord humbled, and confounded. He approached her, saying, "Can my Maria admit once more a penitent to her heart?—a husband who never will again transgress in thought. Can you pardon me for having been the dupe of appearances? the tool of a hateful, perfidious woman?—My much-loved wife! how can I atone for the unmerited misery which my credulity has occasioned?"

"By convincing me, my lord, that I am re-instated in your good opinion."

"Maria, my life shall prove it—Every hour I will try to become more worthy of you." And the earl related the communication he had received from Jenny. "And now," said the earl, "if it meet your approbation (as I hope never to act again without it), let us resolve not to gratify the public by a notice of what has passed—every wonder has its hour, and dies. The world

in future shall be a secondary object: never more will I bow to its shrine. My conscience henceforth shall be my guide; and you, my kind monitress, must keep me in the path. We will teach our children virtue, by adhering to its dictates; and never shall they frequent that horrid school of vice a masquerade."

"Most heartily, my dear lord, do I join in your opinion. This last was the keenest blow that fortune ever dealt me: and though I felt it severely, I derived confidence from my innocence that you would by some means shortly know I suffered unjustly. God has rewarded my hope, and I am grateful. I cannot account for this mischief: I have so few acquaintances; I have not knowingly offended any person."

"Maria, you have yet to learn that some have dispositions so naturally prone to evil, as to seek to injure others from no other motive save the delight they feel in persecuting those whom they know to be superior to themselves:—to such the know-

ledge of your virtues would be a stimulus to mischief. If I mistake not, such a mind has Lady Matilda. So convinced am I that our misery originated in her envious bosom, that I will drop her acquaintance:—never more will I enter her door, nor shall she enter mine. I have gained a knowledge to-day I had hitherto been ignorant of:—It is this; that to be happy, a person must adhere to a certain upright rule of conduct, without any regard to the world's opinion: for when we execute the good resolutions we have formed, though they may be opposite to the general manners of the world—it will in time change its opinion to ours. I think, my love, in the present case the best revenge we can take of our enemy is, not to show that our happiness has been disturbed. Suppose, Maria, the chariot wait at the door, and we treat our young ones with an airing?"

"Nothing can be more agreeable to me," said Maria; "the air will, I think, do *me* as much good as *them*."

The children were delighted to accom-

pany their parents after breakfast. The morning was beautiful; and they went to the Park, as the most conspicuous place. Had the greatest phænomenon in nature showed itself there, it could not have occasioned more variety of conjecture than did the appearance of the earl's family in the Ring. Every body (of the *bon ton* I mean) was acquainted with their expected separation; their appearance of course caused universal disappointment; because, as every one loves novelty, and most people scandal, they thought it cruel to be cheated of so delectable an entertainment as the prospect of this separation afforded. Many were the females who had boasted in the hearing of their husbands, "that though she possessed not the beauty nor the fascinating manners of a *certain lady*, she had however a larger stock of prudence." Every carriage approached as near as possible to that of the earl. The female nods addressed to the countess were accompanied with the unfeeling gaze of surprise, rather than

the welcome of cordiality: whilst the subject of this unfriendly treatment returned their strange notice of her with her usual ease and good humour, totally unsuspicious of the general meaning. So happy was she within herself, she felt at peace with all the world, even with Lady Matilda K——. So noble, so strong is the mind when governed by rectitude of principle, that Maria rather pitied than hated the person who could be capable of such diabolical proceedings.

The Earl of U——, when unbiassed by passion or the opinion of worldly friends, was really a sensible man. He was aware that the world and he were not at this crisis on the best of terms. Lady Matilda K—— had actually brought a fever upon herself by the agitation of her mind in hurrying to the houses of all her *dear friends* to relate the scene at the masquerade, which she said had been told her by an eye-witness of the fact. And really it grieved her so shockingly that such depravity of

manners should have found its way within her precincts, that she thought it due to herself to assure each of her dear friends that she had been totally deceived in Lady U——; and always finished by an imprecation on hypocrisy. Though Lady Matilda was universally despised for her disagreeable qualities, yet, being the daughter of a duke, even had the news come from a more questionable quarter, as it defamed a spotless character, it would have been believed with avidity. The earl saw the situation in which his too easy credulity had involved him. He saw that the world expected an explanation, which he was determined not to give: and he dreaded lest the women, generally malignant towards their own sex, should insult his lady by adopting a conduct offensive to her feelings. He considered that a temporary absence for a couple of months would be the means of avoiding such unpleasantness. So, that day after dinner he asked his lady whether she had kept Mrs. Stewart's last letter?

"Yes, my lord, I have; and I am ashamed to say that it yet remains unanswered, though it is more than three months since I received it. I will fetch it this instant, and hope you will assist me in making an apology."

The countess brought the letter, from which she read the following paragraph: "This place is totally changed to what it "was when your ladyship quitted it. The "pier no longer displays the varied scene "it presented when you were here. The "law lately passed, which prevents this spot "from being a refuge for debtors, has esta- "blished our honour at the expense of "our pocket. You see I esteem myself "naturalized:—the fact is, I have lived so "long among the Manks, and been so "kindly treated by them, that I look upon "myself as one, and think it the highest "compliment when they treat me as such. "This island cannot boast of any insular "trade but the herring fishery. The num- "ber of strangers who used to find it con-

" venient to frequent it, spent a great deal
" of money; and the circulation improved
" the place and kept it alive. I partake of
" the advantage and pleasure derived from
" the removal of its disgrace, but I most
" cordially wish that some of your fashion-
" able world would come and explore its
" antiquities and its romantic beauties;
" in which I am confident they would feel
" much unexpected gratification. To say
" nothing of the salubrity of the air and the
" great convenience of bathing, which far
" exceed some spots that have been the
" rage, I think too long so,—We have
" every convenience, I may say luxury, of
" hot and cold baths; and wonderful are the
" cures I have myself witnessed, particular-
" ly in debilitated constitutions. I am too
" humble to hope to influence any one;
" but a sort of prophetic spirit tells me it
" will yet become a fashionable resort."

" Suppose, my dear," exclaimed the earl at this part of the letter, " we take our family to explore its beauties? During the

few days I was there," continued the earl, "I really thought the air particularly exhilarating,—it would be delightful for the children. As it is now only July, we may stay two months, and return in time for the winter;—what say you, my love?"

"That few things would give me more pleasure, my lord, than in your society to see those friends who treated me so kindly. And if you could contrive, my lord, to take Holywell in your road, going or returning, it would be an additional gratification."

"We will: so to-morrow do you call on those to whom we ought to pay that respect before we leave London. The next day we will commence our voyage. And together we will endeavour to make your peace with Mrs. Stewart."

The author having accompanied her heroine through her several trials, and having brought her history down to the present time, when the turbulence of violent passions had subsided in the mind of her hus-

band; she feels a great degree of confidence, that, wise by the experience they have gathered in the hitherto varied scene of life, they will pursue the remainder of their transitory course with the mutual assistance of each other, undisturbed by any future storm.

A friend who honoured the author by reading this work in manuscript, having remarked that, for the example and instruction of youth, models of perfection only should be presented to them; the author takes the opportunity of answering the remark, which might perhaps coincide with that of others, by observing, that with her it is a fixed opinion that Nature is ever superior to Fiction, in as much as a perfect character is inconsistent with the imperfections of a mortal being. Nor can she ever think that a fictitious character will claim attention, excite interest, or lead to imitation, in any degree equal to a character drawn from real life, however well constructed the fable, or aided by the powers

of imagery. And on this account the memoirs of one who was her intimate friend have been chosen by her. With these she has associated such events as have occurred within her knowledge, likely to form an interesting whole. Whilst the sufferings of Mrs. Fisher may serve to deter the youthful mind from every step of imprudence, whereof the consequences are not less dangerous from not being immediate; and the faults and blemishes in others may prove as beacons in steering our course;—the steady principles of Maria may be an encouragement to the constant practice of virtue.

THE END.

Printed by R. and A. Taylor, Shoe Lane, London.

DIVISION 2,
SHELF C. No. 2.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 041663623